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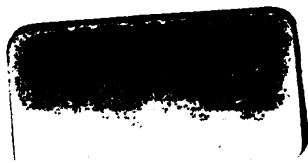
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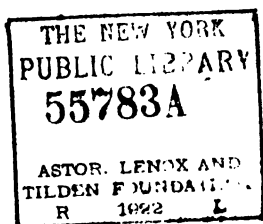
THE MAKING
OF
CHRISTOPHER FERRINGHAM

BY
BEULAH MARIE DIX
AUTHOR OF "HUGH GWYNETH," "SOLDIER BIGDALE," ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
A HEALTH TO KING CHARLES	1

CHAPTER II

THE KINSMAN OF CALDERWOOD	16
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

OUT OF HIS OWN MOUTH	29
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

IN THE HABITATIONS OF THE WICKED	45
--	----

CHAPTER V

THE PROUD PEAT	63
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE DEVIL WAS SICK	80
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN CHRISTOPHER DIVERTS HIMSELF WITH MEADOW- CREEK	96
---	----

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENOCH-CHASE	114
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX	
	PAGE
AFTER THE REAPING	132
CHAPTER X	
WHO DANCE MUST PAY	148
CHAPTER XI	
"THE WORLD GOES ON WHEELS"	162
CHAPTER XII	
THE FREIGHTAGE OF THE "GOODFELLOW"	177
CHAPTER XIII	
JUDGMENTS OF THE RIGHTEOUS	194
CHAPTER XIV	
THE MANNING OF THE KESTREL	212
CHAPTER XV	
IN THE OUTER DARK	231
CHAPTER XVI	
WITH ALL HIS IMPERFECTIONS ON HIS HEAD	249
CHAPTER XVII	
WHEREIN MEADOWCREEK DIVERTS ITSELF WITH CHRISTOPHER	265
CHAPTER XVIII	
BELOW THE SALT	277
CHAPTER XIX	
UP THE HILL AND DOWN AGAIN	298

CHAPTER XX

FOR PITY'S SAKE	PAGE 308
---------------------------	-------------

CHAPTER XXI

HER BROTHER'S SISTER	323
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII

WHO STAND AND WAIT	337
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RACE OF THE SLOW	353
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIV

DOWN TO THE SEA	370
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV

TO THE TUNE OF "JOHN DORY"	387
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI

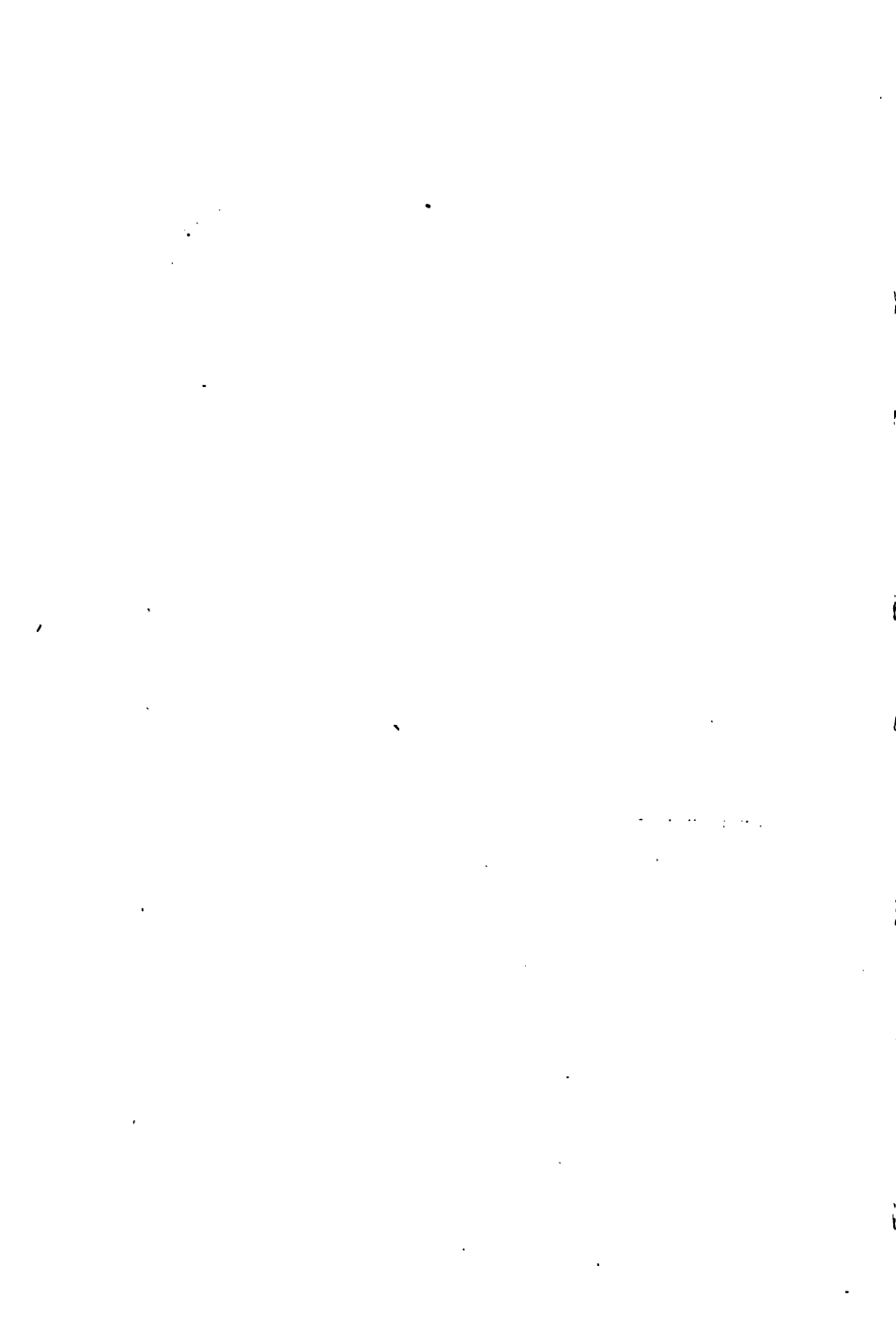
THE DREAM BEFORE THE DAWN	406
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MASTER OF THE "GILLIFLOWER"	421
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WHEN THE SUN AND MOON DANCE ON THE GREEN"	438
--	-----



THE MAKING OF CHRISTOPHER FERRINGHAM

CHAPTER I

A HEALTH TO KING CHARLES

TOWARD the close of a sluggish day in mid-June three men sat tippling in the common room of the Meadowcreek alehouse. At the deep fireplace Abigail Naylor, the hostess, was broiling alewives for her evening meal, and the stagnant air was heavy with the greasy odor. The shutters streetward had been closed against the noontime glare; only the broad side-window that looked out upon the lane that led to the landing stood open. Through it came the clang, clang of iron in the smith's shop over the way, a whiff of sweet brier, and faintly, now and again, a salt stirring of wind.

Without question, the drinkers would have found it cooler to swallow their home-brewed on the bench by the door of the alehouse, but Rinyon Crozier, who was not his own master, scrupled to make a show of his leisure. Prudently he had slipped inside for his pottle of small beer, whither Webb Hayne and Ziba Trull, loitering along later, had by a gregarious impulse followed him. Yet this friendly feeling found scant vent in words. Surlily the three slouched on elbows over the trestle-table in the corner, while with the silent appreciation of men whose pence for beer are few they gulped their drink. It was quite unlooked for when at last Trull broke out, "What work hath held ye, Rinyon?"

The man addressed, a long-limbed fellow, with strong lines about his clean-shaven lips and an experienced look in his gray eyes that made him seem middle-aged, drew a deliberate hand across his mouth. "I was picking the bit stanes i' the Domnie's new field," he drawled indifferently.

"I sought to hoe my field o' beans," droned Trull, "but there was a misery in my back."

Over by the fireplace Goodwife Naylor apostrophized her alewives with a "Humph!" ere she turned them sizzingly.

Hayne, little and lithe and sunburnt, cast a deprecating glance at her contemptuous shoulders and fiddled with his empty pottle, then ventured softly: "Goodwife, will ye be filling my canikin? I said" — still to unheeding shoulders — "will ye not let me have another drop o' the beer? I'll surely bring ye a mess o' trout, come Saturday."

"When you bring 'em 'twill be time enough to skink you the liquor, Webb Hayne," retorted the hostess.

In the dry, discouraged silence that fell on the corner by the trestle-table the clang of the smithy rose insistent. "Constable labors late," muttered Crozier.

"Did you not mark 'twas Nate Calderwood's horse?" grunted Hayne. "Constable would do aught for Calderwood."

"Vengeance light on 'em both!" Trull jerked out, with a vicious setting of his narrow jaw.

Though low, his voice had not been low enough, for Abigail Naylor quitted her alewives and fell upon the drinkers. "Don't ye be speaking such words of your betters, Ziba Trull, and under my roof, too, as if ye'd not cast discredit enough upon us a'ready, a-tipping here but a fortnight come Tuesday so as the Tithingman must look to you, and I a poor, helpless woman, for Tom Naylor that would startle at his own shadow doth naught but leaves all a' my shoulders, so as I must put up with all the shot-clog ruffianage in the village when they choose to go on as the house were no more than a bagnio

Come, pack out, the ging o' ye! You've drunk enough this night. Such idle, thriftless coystrials as I never saw —"

"When saw you your brother Pritchard last, then, good-wife?" Trull queried.

A sudden odor of burning made the hostess scurry across the sanded floor to her hearth, but through the hiss of the turning alewives her voice shrilled: "Benoni Pritchard is no brother of mine, well ye know, Ziba, and Heaven be thanked that 'tis so! No more than husband to my sister, and, I be happy therefor, 'twas no match of my making." An extra sputter of the broiling fish, as she lifted them from the fire, outdid her voice.

Profiting by such respite, Hayne set forth: "Benoni hath gone to Boston town. A' sailed hence in his shallop yestern-morning, and Tom Naylor went wi' him to bide out the week."

"Anywhither so he be out o' tongue-range, puir soul!" murmured Crozier, but Trull spoke out heartily: "Benoni'll fetch home a jug of Jamaica rumbullion. Fecks! I'll be with ye at the hemmel to-morrow, Webb."

Followed a space of pleased anticipation, void of speech, while Goodwife Naylor, all aflush, set the alewives on her private table in the chimney corner. The smoke cleared itself from the air, as a little added breeze fluttered in at the window; with it came a grain of dust, too, from the lane where all was beach sand. The din of the smithy had died down, but out yonder in the shoreward fields a tardy locust raised an ear-piercing shrill. "Wearifu' hot 'twill hold," breathed Crozier; then his voice trailed off, and he sat with eyes on the open window, so intent that his companions, too, swung about and gazed thither.

In the framing of the casement, with the glare of blue sky behind him, a man was standing. The outlines of his flapping hat-brim and clean-cut shoulders were vivid against the blue, while his face for the instant was obscure. Only that he was a stranger they knew, and the moment he spoke a certain light

quality in his voice betrayed that he was young. "Have you to drink within, friends? Then, by your leave, I'll make one among you."

On the word he clapped hand to the window-ledge. Those within heard the sharp click of a rapier against the window-frame, had a swift sight of two boots of Spanish leather; then the stranger was recovering himself in the centre of the room, and the outraged hostess was scolding, "Now that's a brave way to enter a decent body's house!"

With one alert arm the man sent his felt hat swinging into the farthest corner, with the other cast his baldric loose, and, clapping his rapier down on the nearest form with a "God send I need thee not!" set himself, all in a breath, astride a stool opposite the steaming alewives. "You cooked supper against my coming, didn't you, dame?" he asked, with a smile that was more in his eyes than on his lips.

"Well, well! and who might you be?"

"A hungry man. Thirsty too, else the devil may take me! Fetch me to drink, prithee. Ale, if you've any that's nappy. Sack, if you keep't. But, good mistress, for the love o' Heaven seek not to make me swallow down ciderkin under the name o' sack. I warn you 'tis a bootless endeavor. 'Slife! I've not been drunk in five kingdoms for naught."

"There's beer, and of mine own brewing," the goodwife spoke severely, as she set a stone jug before him. "'Tis heady as a youth of your years should drink."

"Or perhaps you can give me a draught of milk?" the young fellow interrupted, with the laugh glinting across his face again. "Come, come, mistress, you'll not make me believe your round Puritan magistrate grows rosy on such wash. Fetch me your Lord High Deputy Governor's own drink. 'Sblood! ye need have no fear for the shot." He drew his hand from his breeches pocket and sent two bright bits of money clanging across the table.

Royals of eight, Abigail Naylor perceived, and, after a

sharp glance of lessening dubiousness from them to her guest, she fetched from her buttery a generous flagon. "To be sure, I am not licensed to draw wine, but my man is hence, and I would not that a traveller should go thirsty, and a gentleman, too, that surely would not bring discredit on a decent house," she hinted. "So here you have it, sir, the right sherris sack."

"On my credit, this smacks of the true quality, at last!" cried the man, putting forth an eager arm to relieve her. "Come, you shall handsel it yourself, mistress, sink me but you shall! Tell you, I cannot eat unless there be a comely face t'other side o' the board."

Then it was, as he glanced boldly at her, that he seemed first aware of the three men, all interest, who were watching him from the corner over their empty cans. "Curse me if I can drink while the next man sits dry!" he cried, and, catching up the beer-jug, swung it out with an impartial gesture. "Fill again, boys!"

Trull, on his feet at the word, took the jug. "By your Worship's leave, we'll drink your Worship's good health," he protested, and Hayne tugged his forelock. Only Crozier, with a half scowl on his brows, kept his bench and his empty pottle. The two others swallowed the beer unheeding, but he studied the man who had given it. Half grudgingly he admired the stranger's slight, sinewy figure; he could realize the fighting possibilities in the perfect proportion of the broad shoulders to the slender loins. Something in the fellow's carriage, too, not alone his erectness and masterful poise, but his trick 'of stepping and sitting wide, made Crozier sum him up a soldier and a horseman.

This he noted because he was a man; while Abigail Naylor, sipping the wine opposite her guest, noted, because she was a woman, that his yellow-brown hair, which, unlike the men of Massachusetts Bay, he wore almost touching his shoulders, was soft-seeming and curly enough to give it a tousled look; and she noted, too, that his doublet of tawny-colored perpetuana

was slashed in defiance of every sumptuary law, and his shirt, where it showed through the slashings, was of fine holland.

"Now," said Goodwife Naylor, "there's no creature on this earth I have so little friendliness to — bearing always in mind that we should love one another, except Jesuits and Papists, — as I say, there's no creature I do so condemn as one who is ever prying into her neighbors' matters, as doth Goodwife — but I am not one to name names. Myself, I never meddle with what doth not concern me, for 'He who meddles not, mars not,' but, since I be left keeper of the ordinary, 'tis my duty to the good town of Meadowcreek and to the whole jurisdiction of the Bay, and I never was one to shirk an ill duty, and so — would you not be pleased, sir, to tell me whence you come?"

"Off Quasset mud-bank," the young man answered. His face disappeared for the moment behind his pewter tankard, but over the rim his eyes watched her. They were blue-gray eyes, and in each, Goodwife Naylor was aware, lurked enough of devilry. "I think 'tis called Quasset flat. I could find it again, be sure. Benoni Pritchard — do you know Benoni? a little man like a tun on two legs — Benoni and I set forth from Boston this morning. Down by — Noddle's Island, is it, they call it? — Benoni, the curse of Cromwell on him! was taken with a cramp. He said 'twas a cramp. So I set the nozzle of a jug of kill-devil between his teeth and I myself took the tiller. Now I can sail a boat with the best, but 'srounds! I bear no chart of the north coast in my brain, so in God's good time we sailed gently on Quasset flat, and there we stuck till the tide was pleased to turn. I took the jug away from Benoni time enough to learn how long our purgatory period must be. But he had a relapse — more cramps, and a pest on him! — so I ordered matters and ran the boat in on a bit of sandy beach here. And I left Benoni with his head on my cloak bag and the empty jug for bed-fellow, and I came away to seek my supper."

"So you come from Boston?" the hostess put in a word. "But you're no Bay man, I'll be bound. Your doublet was never cut this side o' the water."

"Well," the man answered, swinging out one leg, "that boot is made of Cordovan leather, but 'tis no proof I have been in Spain."

"You are mighty cautious," she accepted her defeat with a laugh. "Perchance, though, you'd venture so much as to tell us what your name might be?"

"It might be Kit Ferrers," the man returned, and this time his lips smiled with his eyes; his mustache was so short and slight that his flexile mouth was as easily read as a girl's. "And my business — to ask it was your next duty to the town of Meadowcreek, was't not? — well, my business is —" For a long minute he drank, till he had drained his tankard, then, as he set it down, concluded pleasantly, "My business is to mind my own affairs."

Afterward Goodwife Naylor felt that she should have resented such incivility, but at the moment Kit Ferrers was refilling her cup with so merry a face that she must perforce smile back. "Have your way, if ye will, master. But I warn you if you go on drinking and swearing this gait in a peaceful town like ours, you'll soon have to give some further account of yourself. If Goodman Soper, the Tithingman, should chance to carry you before Master Calderwood, you'd have to loose your tongue."

"Calderwood," Ferrers repeated, with a pucker of the eyebrows. "'Fore George! I've heard that name ere now."

"No question," the hostess nodded. "Master Calderwood is one of the governor's assistants, no finer gentleman in all the Bay. No doubt you've heard of him."

"What manner of man might he be, now?" Ferrers questioned carelessly, with his attention, to all seeming, fixed on the wine he was sipping.

"He is a very godly man," sneered Trull, emboldened by much beer.

"Now there's a true word though ye spoke it in scorn," the hostess withered him. "It's I can tell you of the Calderwoods, Master Ferrers, I that was of their household ere I wed Tom Naylor, poor, thriftless body! Twelve year ago 'twas, and my first man, good soul! dead o' the spotted fever, that I went to service in Master Calderwood's house, and I came wi' him out from Boston unto Meadowcreek, and mercy keep you, young gentleman, from ever sitting down in so forlorn a spot as 'twas then! And 'tis Master Calderwood you can thank that a fair village blooms here now. He and Matthew Gleason that is constable, and Master Atherton, and Master Jeanison, —'twas they came hither first, and then there were good men glad to follow after, and idle, profitless do-naughts came too!" This for the listening company by the trestle-table. "And now he is a magistrate, and he but little past forty, but 'tis fitting that he should be set on the right hand of authority, he that hath ordered his own affairs so well. A young man and poor he came hither, and now he hath house and land a-plenty, and lands by Nashaway, too, and beyond Piscataquay, and he saith to a man 'Go!' and he goeth. A godly, zealous gentleman, be the matter of church or Commonwealth, and 'tis five comely children he hath that I have held in these arms — ay, and a sweet sister, too, that doth not forget her old gossip, and his wife — yes, she's a right gentlewoman, though she'll be carrying her head pretty high. She was a Ferringham, you must know, and they're a rich, great family in Worcester-shire, and if you'll believe Elizabeth Calderwood's tales, they're better than the very kings of England — though they, to be sure, have oft been poor, feckless creatures. I see not, I, why a Ferringham is better than a Calderwood nor any other honest man: they all go back to Adam."

Ferrers threw back his head in a burst of such happy laughter that the narrator, a little breathless with her pace, found no heart to be angered. "My word, you bear hard on those harmless bodies, the Ferringhams!" he chuckled.

"Nay, stay not that I laughed out. Tell me more of 'em, more of your mighty Master Calderwood. A godly man, you say?"

"A' is deacon of the church," proffered Hayne.

"Yes, and widows and orphans may bless his name," the hostess took up the chime.

"And whatever poor creature keep from meeting, though for no more than lawful sickness, may curse him," put in Trull. "He'll have him before him and clap a fine on him —"

"Because he is assistant, a' is sole justice here in Meadowcreek," Hayne drowned his voice. "The Meadowcreek Court, that's Master Nathan Calderwood. 'Will fine a man for selling a penny'orth o' powder to the Indians, and set him in the stocks if he but look on wine. A' is a bitter hard man."

"No doubt, hard to all idle rogues," cried the goodwife, with a shrillness that made her words distinct above the men's gruff tones. "'Is an honorable, God-fearing gentleman who doth his duty by the Commonwealth —"

"With ane eye ever outlooking 'gainst the time the governorship fall vacant," spoke Crozier's sad voice. "'Would fain be Winthrop and Endicott and Bellingham all rolled in ane."

At that Goodwife Naylor bounced to her feet. "Now what are you, Trescott's Rinyon, to lift your voice against a magistrate and a deacon? you that came into the Plantation with no shirt to your back nor shoes to your feet, and a pack of ragged, rebel Scots like yourself for comrades, and was bought and sold yonder on Boston wharves, and Master Trescott, good soul! he paying ten pound for your seven years' time, and a sorry bargain it was for him!"

Crozier bent his head and sat silent under the tirade, while his drinking-companions grinned, when amazingly the gentleman in the chimney corner started up. "Now hang me but you've prated enough and to spare! 'Swounds! will you that wear farthingales never learn what pestilence cowardice

'tis to tongue it against us?" Then as the irate hostess stood silent for sheer bewilderment, he seemed first aware of the peremptoriness in his tone and straightway turned the word: "Ah, for the love o' pity don't deafen me now! Come ill me up the flagon again, that's a comfortable body. Strike me dead but I'll drink a health to your Saint Calderwood! Fetch me the wine now, while I let in light enough to see if there be a spider in the cup!"

Whistling a stave, he swung across the room, and, unfastening the hasp, flung wide the rude shutter of one of the windows that looked upon the street. Within, the shadows now were thickening, but out-of-doors a red smear of sunset stained the sky above the western hills, and a fleck of light sloped along the roofs of the greater houses. In the deserted market place before the alehouse, where the lane from the landing joined the main road, the heavy sand gave back a tinge of yellow, but to right and left, where the street shrank narrower between two uneven lines of dwellings, dooryards and roadway and rough-timbered house-fronts were alike muffled in gray shade.

Ferrers gazed from one dumb house-front to the other. "Now which cottage is it where your good Puritan Master Calderwood dwells?" he broke into question.

"His old house lies toward the marshes," the hostess, albe resentful, forced a civil tone for her free-handed guest. "He dwells now at his farm, yonder at the last brook, two mile without the village; but if you're wanting to speak with him to-night, I've small doubt but you'll find him just over the way at Constable Gleason's. Ay, look you, 'tis his bay horse stands before the smithy."

Across the market place the young man's glance, following her hand, rested on a pitched-roof dwelling-house, with a row of outbuildings and, on the left, a black shop, whence glowered a red gleam as of coals. Then he began to smile, for, looking nearer home, he took note of the upright pillar and the two benches beneath it which held the centre of the market place

—whipping-post and town stocks, convenient both to the Constable's dwelling and to the meeting-house. "'Slife! 'tis not only that your Master Calderwood is a stern man and pious, but he is a crony of the Constable, who lives over against the whipping-post," he chuckled. "Come, dame, when he sees me—you said I might be taken before him—what think you he'll have to say to me?"

"Say? 'Twould be more than saying, you can lay it to heart, master," the goodwife took him up. "A profane swearer and a mere tosspot! He'd lay you by the heels for to-night."

"He'd lay me by the heels! Body o' me!" Ferrers laughed, and, still laughing, swaggered across the room and sprang up on the table, where he sat with legs swinging. "Here's to the health of this Brutus of a magistrate! Come, lads, you're to join me. Pest on't! beer is no fit brewing in which to pledge such a pattern o' the times. Come, fill up your cups with the sack."

With no stay for a second bidding, Ziba Trull and Hayne scrambled over to him, and the wine was bubbling into their ready canikins, when the goodwife uttered a warning "Softly, sir."

A newcomer had just stepped into the common room, a bullet-headed, thickset man,—so much could be made out in the gathering dusk—who with no word, good or ill, folded his arms and stood scowling on the drinkers. Perceptibly the Meadowcreek men shrank away from their entertainer, but Ferrers, quite unawed, went on filling his tankard. "How do you call this?" he asked, with a jerk of his tousled head toward the intruder.

"'Tis Goodman Amariah Soper," the hostess spoke anxiously. "'Tis the Tithingman."

"Is aught amiss with him that he keeps such a countenance? Come, Goodman Tithingman, crush a cup with me. 'Sdeath! 'tis smitten dumb. In any case, I'll drink your merry health."

"You have drunk enough already," the Tithingman broke in. "'Tis over a half-hour you have sat here."

"Swounds!" cried Ferrers, and smote his thigh, with a gurgle of enjoyment. "It hath found tongue; it can talk."

"Sirrah," Amariah Soper cut him short, "you are drunk."

"Sirrah," the young man retorted, "you are a liar." He vaulted off the table and strode up to the Tithingman. "This is my left hand, d'ye mark it? This is my right. I can stand steady, — o' one foot, if I choose, and fetch you a kick with the other. I can see straight, too, straight enough to take you a buffet between the eyes. I am not drunk, but if you'll bide a bit, I will be, quick as sherris sack and deep healths will make me."

"Hold your peace!" Soper raised his voice. "For you, you rakeshames, pack home to your houses, and you, you Scotch landleaper, look how you walk, else you'll strip for the whipping-post ere many days be out. And as for you, you woman-haired son of iniquity, if you do not within five minutes betake yourself in submissive wise to Master Calderwood yonder at the Constable's house, I'll do my office and drag you thither."

Ferrers leaned forward and snapped his fingers within an inch of the Tithingman's beard. "You!" was all he said.

"Now, now, Goodman Soper," urged Abigail Naylor, twisting her apron between her hands, "be patient, prithee, and heed a friend hath poured ye a quiet cup more times than one, and will again, so please you. The young gentleman is a stranger; he knows not the law. When he does, I doubt not for the credit of a decent house he will go hence quietly."

"Then, to favor you, Abigail, I'll give this roisterer to know 'tis my office, the tithingman's office, to see that no profane swaggerer drink longer than a half-hour in any tavern, ordinary, or house of entertainment, and more, that I put the law in force. No man durst be drinking of healths in Meadow-creek or —"

Ferrers stepped back to the table and raised his tankard deliberately. "Refuse me if I drink not now a health elbow-deep! Come, lads, I'll pledge you the best health of all. Are your canikins filled there? Now, then, who'll do me right? To the bonny prince, to our king beyond seas, to King Charles! Who'll do me right?"

There was an instant of appalled silence in the dusky common room; the hostess caught a frightened breath; the sand on the floor crunched, as Trull and Hayne cringed farther from the stranger; and then, with a harsh creak of the trestles, Rinyon Crozier swung himself over the table and strode up to Ferrers. "Fill me a canikin, master. I'll drink that health wi' you."

"Give your breath to such a damnable pledge," interrupted Soper, "and 'twill cost you the skin of your back —"

"Haud your tongue!" Crozier faced him. "Dinna ye speak whips to a better man than you, one that's had out his sword where you darena come —"

"Where?" cried Ferrers.

"Dunbar, for the Kirk and King Charlie."

"I was at Worcester." Ferrers's voice came quick and with a new note in it; he drew closer to the Scotchman and, clapping him on the back, cast his arm about his shoulders. "'Slife! we're comrades in arms. Drink, man. One cup to us both. King Charles!"

There Soper struck the tankard crashing from the young man's hand. "No healths to Papists and usurpers are drunk in this godly town."

A little breathless hush followed on the thud with which the pewter vessel struck the floor, then sickeningly came the smack of an open hand on undefended flesh, as Ferrers fetched the Tithingman a mighty blow on the mouth. Even as Soper staggered back, the young fellow tore off his doublet and cast it away. "Papists and usurpers!" he said, in a low voice whence all badinage was gone. "You'll go down a' your

marrow-bones now, you scabby Roundhead, and lap up that wine to the health of your king!"

Even before the two men grappled, Abigail Naylor, darting by them to the door, shrieked to the dusky street for help. Within, the three ne'er-do-wells neither heeded nor heard her amid the crash of overturned stools and table, and the dull sound of the blows that bruised upon the bodies of the combatants. Ferrers's shirt showed clear in the dusk, a white streak swaying forward and back, as he struck and parried. Then the two had clenched, black coat and white shirt, — that was when already without the door was heard the noise of men approaching, — and Ferrers, helpless though he looked in his stouter antagonist's grip, bent his slight body and, stepping aside, sent the man reeling backward. He was down upon Soper as he fell, his knee was on the Tithingman's shoulders, his hands on the scruff of his neck, and, as he ground the man's face into the puddle of spilt liquor, his voice rose sharp and uncontrolled: "To your king's health, you scurvy rebel!"

The townsmen had burst into the common room, and at their head, distinguishable even in the twilight, loomed the deep-chested, burly figure of the blacksmith Constable. It was he who, with a practised grip on throat and collar, dragged Ferrers to his feet and pinned him against the wall, but it was Nathan Calderwood's clear-cut tones that spoke, quelling the tumult of outcries, "Fetch a light hither, Abigail."

A moment, and the gusty flare of a lighted candle wavered across the black walls, touched with startling brightness the white faces of the townsmen, and flickered upon Amariah Soper, who, all befouled with sand and spilt wine and the blood from his cut lip, had crawled to his feet. Then Calderwood, taking the candle from the woman's hand, flung the light mercilessly upon Kit Ferrers. He stood submissive, back to the wall, with his arm in the Constable's grasp; his shirt had been torn in the scuffle so his throat and half his chest

were bare, and he breathed heavily, with quick parting of the lips, but his eyes, half curious, half merry, met those of his captors with no hint of abashment.

"Who might this be?" asked the Magistrate, in an icy voice that fitted his stern, aquiline face.

"It's not far to question, Master Calderwood," spoke the Constable, with a contemptuous bending of the brows upon his prisoner. "Oversea, when I carried a halberd under Skippon, we fought gallants of this coat a half-score times and beat 'em too. He hath all the marks of the devil's own upon him."

"Lodge him in your strong room for to-night," Calderwood ordered, and made as if to turn upon his heel.

"Didn't you say so, mistress?" Ferrers laughed pantingly. "But, by your leave, sirs, I've no mind to sleep in any man's strong room or strong box. Pray you, let go my arm." With a sudden movement he wrenched out of the Constable's hold, and, sauntering across the room amid the scowling folk, took up his discarded doublet. "I've somewhat here for you, Master Calderwood," he spoke, swinging the garment by the skirts, while he fumbled in the pockets. "Letters out of England. From Sir Edward Ferringham of Ferringhurst."

"My father-in-law?" Calderwood asked slowly. "What have you to do with him? You are—"

Ferrers looked him in the face, while his lips twitched into a smile beneath his young mustache and the very devil glanced in his eyes. "I am your loving nephew, Christopher Ferringham."

CHAPTER II

THE KINSMAN OF CALDERWOOD

"MOTHER, mother!"

"Is it thou, Lucy?" Mistress Calderwood hushed small David's purposeless babblement of "a big 'tick" and "a crosso he-goat" while she asked the question.

"It is I, mother. May I come in?"

As the door into the western chamber swung open, a ray of candlelight struck through the shadows and from the blackness flashed into sharp outline the vast bulk of the bed and the great chest of drawers that stood by the casement. Between the chest and the narrow trundle-bed a placid glow fell upon Elizabeth Calderwood, and showed her a fair, full-bosomed matron, in whose arms it seemed most fitting that a little child should nestle.

"Can you guess it, mother?" Lucy panted yet, and the flame of the candle which she screened with rosy fingers flickered in the gust of her swift coming. "Father is returned at last, and he hath brought a stranger with him. Deborah was drawing water at the well, and he came thither with this gentleman, and she was sure 'twas not Captain Enoch Gleason, nor was't Master Atherton, nor the Constable. Mother, it cannot be Master Winthrop from Pullen Point, or—"

"What Audrey have I here?" the mother chided. "Didst never look on a stranger and a gentleman ere this, child?"

"Indeed, almost never, mother," pouted Lucy. "When I go to Boston perhaps once in a twelvemonth to buy a new ribbon, and meantime converse with Nan — though I love Nan

dearly — or with Benjie Trescott and my brothers. And I do so long to see a new face and hear a new voice. Oh, if he stay the night, may I not come into the great room to listen, good mother, and — ”

“Truly, Lucy,” Mistress Calderwood hushed her daughter’s eager tones, “you should remember that you are of the blood of the Ferringhams, and try to school yourself to a decorum such as befits the descendant of so honorable a house. Above all, keep yourself from foolish curiosity, which is ever a mark of the ignoble mind.”

“I meant not,” murmured Lucy, with a droop of her pretty head. She looked as Elizabeth Calderwood must have looked at sixteen ; or, rather, gazing on the mother and the daughter, one saw the large curves and placid lines into which the girl must fall inside a score of years. But now she was pretty, with the cuddlesome, plump prettiness of a kitten, and, to that, she had smooth hair that in the candlelight was pale gold, and a skin as satiny even as baby David’s.

Her cheeks were now a little reddened by her mother’s last words, and once and again she stole a side-glance at Mistress Calderwood and made as if to speak. But speedily the matron anticipated her, for as she laid David in his trundle-bed, she questioned, “So Deborah saw this stranger ? ”

“Yes, mother.”

“And ’twas a gentleman she knew not ? I do ask myself — ”

A demure smile rippled across Lucy’s face, but she volunteered generously, “He was bravely dressed, mother, so far as she could see, and comely — ”

“Fie ! See all this in the twilight ? What other foolish tales had she to tell ? ”

Lucy’s lips were already parted, when without in the kitchen sounded a firm tread. “’Tis father,” the girl whispered. “I shall slip forth at the hall door and warn Nan. She and Jack went to seek Red Cole, and she hath on her old blue gown, and surely ’twould break her heart to meet a fine gentleman and a

stranger, and she so meanly clad. And I myself shall don — For I may come into the parlor where he is, sweet mother? And —”

There the door creaked open, and from the glow of the kitchen Nathan Calderwood stepped into the chamber. “Run hence, lass,” he spoke hastily to his daughter’s flurried courtesy, and, halting by the table where the candle shone, drew a paper from within his doublet.

For a moment in the dim chamber was a silence that deepened by contrast with the slow peep of the frogs in the outer twilight. “Mama,” David whispered once, and rustled under his coverlets, and the paper in Calderwood’s hands crackled. His voice sounded unexpectedly loud when at last he glanced up from his reading to say, “These be letters out of England, Bess, from thy father.”

“Yea,” answered Elizabeth, with admiring eyes upon her husband’s clear profile that showed dark against the candlelight.

“He writes of thy brother Christopher, and of his son.”

“His son, Nathan? What! Little Christopher is found?”

“He is here, Bess, just without in the house-yard.”

Mistress Calderwood rose to her feet. “Christopher’s boy here, under our very roof?” she repeated, while the tears began to brim her large eyes. “Call him in, Nathan. Where left you him? I must see him, speak to him. The dear rogue! I have not seen him since he wore little coats and close caps.”

“You’ll find he hath altered somewhat since those days,” Calderwood answered, in so dry a tone that Elizabeth was checked. “I found the dear rogue in the thick of a drunken brawl at Tom Naylor’s house. For our father’s sake I forbore to clap him up in prison, and fetched him home. I left him at the well to wash his hands and face ere he enter into a decent household.”

“Oh, so like his father!” Elizabeth cried. “He was ever a gentleman of mettle.”

With an impatient crackle Calderwood spread out his letter. "Hark hither!" he spoke curtly, and read:—

GOOD SON CALDERWOOD: These writings I despatch unto you by the hand of my grandson, Christopher Ferringham. I pray you by whatever claims I have on your good offices, admit this young man into your household, and see to it that he walk the right path without stumbling or swerving. He is but newly snatched from the very bosom of Popery and malignancy. Of his evil nurture, how, after he was taken from our Christian care, he was bred up in the very camp of Charles Stuart, at the fountain head of abomination, I will not speak here. Enough that last summertide he was with the malignants who came with the evil son of that false and evil king to subvert our laws and waste our lands. He was made prisoner at Worcester, and it was from prison that my pity took him, wounded, and, to all seeming, near to death. His life is preserved, by Heaven's very grace, methinks, for his soul's salvation. Somewhat I have wrought with him already, but here in this distracted country evil companions are not far to seek. In the Massachusetts only men of godly conversation are met with, I hear, and the law itself holdeth the weaker brethren from falling. Therefore I judge it well to commit Christopher to your pious keeping, with an earnest prayer that at the next writing you may send me good report of him. My favor to him, he knows well, will grow with his deserving.

We are all (I praise God) in notable health, save my grandson George, who, as is the will of Heaven, to which I submit myself, hath no increase of strength. His faithful wife is constant in her loving service. There seems scant hope now that they will be blessed with offspring. My nephew, (to my sorrow!) Thomas Ferringham, goes still his redeless course, though somewhat less of a Presbyterian since Kirk and Covenant went down at Dunbar. In very earnest, my good Nathan, I had liefer see a reclaimed Cavalier, such as young Christopher, the heir of my lands, than one that is off and on with both sides, like Thomas Ferringham.

My wife salutes you all, and I commend you and yours to the protection and blessing of the Lord.

Your loving father and faithful friend,

EDWARD FERRINGHAM.

LONDON, the sixth day of the second month, 1652.

I should counsel you to scant Christopher straitly in the matter of money. I send him out well furnished with necessaries, but slenderly stored with coin. He may draw on you in the next twelvemonth for the sum of five pounds, at your discretion to give or to withhold. I shall requite it to you when next you commission me to send you goods from London. I should also counsel you to trust no horse in Christopher's hands while his pockets be empty. He sold me one gelding out of my very stables.

Calderwood folded the letter into its old creases and a moment stood frowning upon it. "I owe Sir Edward much," he said, half aloud. "He gave me thee, Bess; he built up my fortunes. An 'twere not for that mighty debt, I would so gladly carry this young rakehell to Boston and clap him under the hatches of the first ship sails for England!" Then as he met his wife's eyes, wide in reproach, he curbed his tone: "Nay, wench, our precious nephew is here to stay. Come, we'll look to the young worthy. Stay, though, here is an enclosure for thee lay within the letter; I doubt not from thy mother. Read it first."

He paced thoughtfully to the dark western window, while Elizabeth, taking the sheet on which her mother's faint characters wavered, read to herself the few lines : —

SWEET DAUGHTER: I pray you deal gently with my poor boy. Here they all be set to prove his least word evil, which doth make him the worse. If you will but entreat him lovingly, he will do aught for your asking. Bear with him patiently, dear Bess. He is the very pattern of our Christopher we did so cherish.

Your ever loving mother,

MARY FERRINGHAM.

Mistress Calderwood laid by the little letter, and rose, candle in hand. "Come, Nathan, I would see the poor boy now," she spoke tremulously.

Without, in the wide kitchen, she found the poor boy readily enough. He was standing before the fireplace, where the

light from the candles on the chimney-piece above made his rumpled hair more yellow than brown, with one foot on the settle and his bent elbow cast across his knee, while he talked, with a rippling accompaniment of 'sbloods and 'spreciouses, to small William and Nathan. The little boys listened open-mouthed to the marvellous stranger, and yonder by the buttery door Deborah, the serving-wench, with a half-dried pan beneath her arm, lingered to catch a word. "Been a soldier, little coz? 'Slife! yes. And killed a man? By these hilts! you've a fierce mind for so small a warrior, and—"

There the sound of Elizabeth's step on the sanded floor made the young man turn and stride quickly toward her. "Aunt Bess! Sink me else!" he cried; and Elizabeth caught him about the neck and clung to him, with inarticulate outpourings: "So like my Christopher! Your dear father alive again! His very look i' the eyes, and his rough hair!"

"The right Ferringham cowlick, aunt."

"I cannot make it seem true. You must be your father, not the little child I used to dandle. Why, when they took you from us, you scarce could toddle about, and now—you are taller than I. Surely, you are tall as Nathan."

A little flushed, as if not used to so much endearment, Christopher drew back and stood shoulder to shoulder with Calderwood. "'Slight! I *am* come near to you, uncle," he said, with something like disappointment in his tone. "Hang me if you've more than an inch the start o' me! I have thought on you as mightily tall. My faith! 'twould task your sinews to sling me into your saddle with one hand now. D'ye remember how you would put me up on your horse's back—the roan you called Morrell—those days when you used to come wooing my aunt at Ferringhurst?"

"You must tell us all of Ferringhurst," Mistress Calderwood interrupted. "I think long to hear of them and— Why, you must have supper. Deborah!"

"You have supped once, I take it?" Calderwood asked, with

his momentary softening of manner mastered, at remembrance of the alehouse, by his old dryness.

"Faith! yes; but I'm ahungered again," Christopher answered promptly. "And thirsty too," he suggested.

"Bring some small beer," Calderwood checked his wife's more sumptuous impulse. "Nay, lay no place for me, Bess. We were long in speech touching the recaulking of the *Gilliflower*, so I supped with the Constable."

"If you were brought to eat of Jane Gleason's cookery," his wife persisted, "you surely stand in need of a hearty supper. Fetch out the cold pasty, Deborah."

"Pasty, aunt?" Christopher struck in. "The Lord bless you!" He stepped up to Mistress Calderwood and kissed her solemnly. "I've eat fish for the last ten weeks, save two sheep, and cursed scabby ones at that, we had at our setting out. And when I landed, hang me if I did not stumble on greasy alewives at the first step! Prithee, show me your pasty, good, sweet aunt!"

The pasty was speedily set forth, with the jug of beer to flank it, and honey and bread and fresh lobster. Christopher fell on nobly, and Calderwood, spite of his first protests, joined him, while Elizabeth, all aflutter, served them both. "To think you are here in this house!" she broke out, as she filled her guest's mug lavishly. "And grown such a man, too. How old are you, Christopher?"

"One and twenty last Whitsuntide, aunt. 'Sprecious! I'm not like to forget it. 'Twas on the high seas my birthday fell, and I made the master—the *Merchant's Hope* 'twas I came over in, and a vengeance old hulk she was!—I made my bully broach a pipe of Canary, and by this hand! there were brave doings. I drank both quartermasters under the table, and the master, a' was a stout old tarpaulin, but refuse me if I sent him not after them! And I, by this I was a little gilded myself, and the gunner's mate and the carpenter tried to put me into my bunk, and —"

"Enough!" Calderwood interrupted sternly. His eyes were not on his nephew, but on the two little boys who, standing behind their mother's stool, were drinking in each word.

"'Sblood! the gunner's mate and the carpenter had enough ere I was done with them," Christopher began, when the door at his right hand that led into the chamber swung slowly ajar.

In the black opening stood David, with his curls loose upon his moist forehead, and his little bedgown gathered up in one fist, while the other was screwed into his eyes. "I did hear somebody," he murmured in a sleepy voice.

"My lamb! thou must go back to bed," Elizabeth Calderwood was beginning, when Christopher, swinging round on his stool, spoke in a new voice, "Come hither, Rittmeister."

David blinked a moment at the light and the faces about him, then, unheeding his mother's outstretched arms and his father's involuntary gesture to restrain him, pattered across the floor and hoisted himself pantingly to Christopher's knee.

"Your least lad, uncle?" the young man asked, as he settled the child eagerly in his arms. "On my soul, he's a chopping boy! How do they call thee, chicken?"

But David was busied in examining the gilt buttons on Christopher's doublet. "Pretty," he crooned, and touched them with a stubby forefinger; then went on shyly to stroke the shimmery silk that lined the slashings of the doublet sleeves. "Pretty, too," he babbled.

"I bought this doublet solely because 'twould please thee," Christopher said gravely. "And I've that in the pockets will please thee better. Look on this that was made for a small boy to pop into his mouth. Doth it hit aright?"

David set his even teeth into a plump raisin and smiled widely at this new playfellow, while William, pocketing up the dignity of his seven years, stole across the floor and, leaning against the table at his cousin's elbow, watched eagerly if more dainties should be forthcoming. "And what were you seeking, sirrah?" Christopher asked in a grim voice, and

pulled the lad's ear. "There's a bit of what they call stick cinnamon you can chew upon. 'Sblood! 'tis pity I've no more raisins."

It was the oath that made Calderwood interrupt, "The child will take cold, Elizabeth, if he stay so long from his bed," and Mistress Calderwood had taken the unwilling David from Christopher's arms, when steps on the doorstep without gave her pause.

A boy's shrill voice spoke outside the door, and it was a boy who came first into the kitchen, a lank, dark youth of fourteen, with the words still on his tongue: "We ha' found Red Cole, father; clean into the Great Swamp she was."

But Christopher, at least, paid small heed to the lad, for behind him two girls entered the room. "My daughter, Lucy," Calderwood spoke formally. "Greet this gentleman, child; he is your cousin."

At the word Christopher swung to his feet and, bowing low, took little Lucy's hand and kissed her, then, his eyes flashing over her rosy face, kissed her again. "Once for civility, my pretty cousin, and once for the kinship," he said, and turned to the other girl.

She, however, had stepped quickly round the table and now stood by Calderwood, with her hand upon his shoulder. Brought thus near together, the resemblance between the two flashed out. There was the same dark coloring, harshened by sunburning in the man, the same quick, brown eyes and level brows, only where Calderwood's hair was almost black the girl's was a coppery brown, and the stern aquiline of his profile was softened in her face.

"'Slife! another cousin," Christopher hazarded.

"My brother's sister, sir," the girl answered, with the least courtesy. She had Calderwood's clear, even tones, but her voice was soft and low-modulated, and in its variations could be felt the very shade of her mood; by her mere inflection Christopher knew she disliked him.

"Then if my uncle is your brother, you must be my aunt, in faith!" he answered, for the sake of saying something that gave his eyes pretext to front her. With utter frankness he took in each line of her supple, slender body, and found it good. Her simple blue gown revealed the alluring curves of bosom and of thigh, but the kerchief came close about her throat. He was vexed at that; a pest on the prudish Puritan garb! A girl of her figure must have a beautiful throat and breast. White, too, for all the firm brown of her cheek; the bit of neck that showed below the curve of her cheek was a warm, creamy white beside the dead white of the linen kerchief.

Calderwood's voice, with a sharp note of rebuke in it, made Christopher withdraw his eyes: "My oldest son, sir, Ferringham Calderwood."

"But they call me Jack, cousin," the boy spoke pleasantly, and came to him with hand held out; then as if Christopher's fine clothes a little awed him, added: "I'm all a-mire because Aunt Nan and I have been tracing a lost cow since supper-time. Nan can trudge the woods as well as any lad, and she's a brave girl at finding the wild flowers too."

"I found the first wild roses of the year, Sister Elizabeth," the brown girl spoke from the arm of Calderwood's chair where she had perched. "Look on them."

"Are they the roses of this country?" asked Christopher seating himself on the corner of the table by his uncle "Slife! they breed rare flowers here."

"And with shrewd thorns too," Nan answered quietly, and avoiding the touch of his outstretched hand, dropped one of her roses on the table before him.

"Offer me thorns or what you will," he replied, with a laugh that was not given back by his eyes, "and destroy me if I find not out a remedy! Have at your thorns now!" He whipped the knife out of his belt, and, his eyes still upon her, began stripping the stem. "'Twill not prick me now, and, under your favor, I'll wear it next my heart."

"The whole bunch, if you will," she answered, in a dry voice that was almost her brother's own. She tossed her flowers upon the table and slipped off the arm of the chair. "By your leave, Nate, and Sister Bess, I'll go to my bed. Red Cole led us a long chase, and I am awearied. Come, Lucy."

The two girls passed out by the little door at the eastern end of the kitchen, Nan first, candle in hand, and behind her Lucy, who on the threshold sent back a blushing glance at Christopher. He threw her a kiss, half laughing, then as Calderwood thrust back his chair and started up impatiently, fell to stroking his slight mustache and twirling in his fingers the thornless rose.

"You shall lie with Jack and the lads to-night, cousin," his host's cool tones broke in on his thoughts.

"To-morrow I shall have the parlor chamber in order for you, Christopher," Elizabeth amended, to which he answered that he could lie anywhere, he was sure to sleep well in her house, he knew; and so trudged away with the three delighted boys.

The young Calderwoods lodged in the rear chamber to the east on the second floor of the house, a bare, big-raftered room that, Christopher reflected, must be icy chill in winter. Even now it was more than pleasantly airy, for a breeze from the sea came in at the open casement so strong that it fluttered the flame of the candle which Jack bore. "You are to sleep in that bed i' the corner with me, cousin," the boy announced shyly, as he began undressing. "Nay, Will, cease talking." This to the seven-year-old, who with a recollection of cinnamon was sidling up to Christopher. "Our cousin doth not wish to be worried with children. Get you to bed."

But Christopher, disregarding the elder-brotherly order, clapped the small boy on the shoulder. "Never mind, my man," he said. "Ere the week's out we'll go fishing together, renounce me if we won't! I've a fowling-piece, too, I left in

the shallop, and you, Jack, sure you know where birds and squirrels are to be met with."

"That I do!" cried Jack, and "Will you suffer me shoot with your fowling-piece sometimes, Cousin Christopher?" drawled slow Nathan.

"All I have is at your service, gentlemen," laughed Christopher. He tossed off his doublet, and then, fumbling in the pockets, drew out, to William's disappointment, no more than a stunted clay pipe. "Will it smother you if I take tobacco here?"

"Mother will not suffer my father's men to take tobacco in the house," Nathan protested.

"But a Ferringham can take tobacco where he will, thou blatteroon!" Jack put in.

Christopher hesitated an instant, then, "Methinks this Ferringham were best take his tobacco out at the window," he said, and, having lighted his pipe, thumped a stool down before the casement and set himself upon it with his head out in the open. "Get you to bed, lads," he spoke between puffs. "And out with the candle. There'll be moon enough to light me."

Very speedily the chamber behind him became silent, and out-of-doors, as he sat gazing, with elbows on the sill and chin in his fists, all was silent too. But through the stillness came soon to his ear the note of in-washing waves, and over in the east, where the wry, swollen moon was mounting, he caught the wide gleam of the sea. Not fifty rods distant it beat upon the shore; the very field that merged into the house-yard below him stretched away, barren and shadowless under the moonlight, till it touched the wet strand. A wide field it proved, that spread out on the right hand, too, till it clambered under the shelter of a thick mass of pines, ragged black against the pale night sky, and on the left hand —

Just there, as he leaned forth still farther at the window, he heard beneath him a voice that held him motionless: "Nay, Lucy, I am not of your mind."

A clear, well-modulated voice, that was carried on the still night air. He was in an eastern chamber, and Cousin Lucy and the brown-eyed girl, he remembered, had gone to the lower eastern chamber to sleep. And one girl, perhaps, had stepped to the open window. Christopher took the pipe from between his teeth and frankly listened.

"I do not think he is 'a gallant gentleman,'" the clear voice spoke again, "nor 'a comely fellow,' not with that mop of hair about his ears."

Christopher ducked his "mop" and chuckled softly.

"And he bore himself like a ruffian swaggering in an ale-house. The very way he eyes a woman is an insult. You need not begin to praise him"—this after an instant's hush—"Truly, Lucy Calderwood, you do sometimes mad me!"

"Hey, hey, boys!" muttered Christopher. "Some one I wot of hath the perquisites of her coppery hair."

"So I was uncivil that I would not let this gallant tousle me?" the voice came, with a short laugh. "I shall be uncivil often, then, Lucy. I would not kiss that man, nay, nor even so much as touch him."

The last words dwindled away, and again, save for the lip-ping of the distant tide, the night was soundless. Christopher puffed at his pipe a moment and studied the moon, who leered back at him in friendly fashion. "So," he muttered, as he knocked the ashes from the bowl, "you think I'm a swaggering ruffian not fit to eye a decent woman, and you wouldn't even touch me, eh? 'Swounds! sweetheart, we'll look to that!"

CHAPTER III

OUT OF HIS OWN MOUTH

"I WAS laid within the grip of the law this morning," Christopher spoke cheerfully at dinner next day. "Under your favor, good uncle, I may rehearse the tale? 'Struth! I've paid roundly for the privilege."

Calderwood, in his place at the head of the long table, bowed the dryest assent, so his nephew, without ceasing to ply his knife, began: "You must know that mine uncle profited by my innocence to lure me unto the scurvy little village, like a lamb unto the slaughter. When in due course we came to Goodwife Naylor's ordinary, 'Let us step in and wet our whistles,' I make bold to proffer. 'Say you so?' he takes me up. 'Sbody! you'll be in no mood for piping when you come forth.'"

"The oath, I need scarce comment, was not mine," Calderwood added frigidly, as he served himself with a second cut of salmon.

"The will was good, sir, else I'll hang for't! He marched me into the alehouse — 'Fore Heaven! I shall believe the tales of Brutus henceforth; a' would have loved you, uncle. For 'twas into court he was dragging me. A court in an ordinary! 'Swounds! I'll look next for a conventicle in a bawdy-house."

Christopher paused time enough to swallow a liberal draught of beer before he ran on: "My uncle sits him down in a poor, crazed armchair over against the fire — afore me! you must have been hot, sir, — and Bully Constable, whom I owe for the rending of my shirt yesternight, marshals me in my merry

boys, all very chapfallen, and in special Goodman Tithingman, with his nose swollen like a bun. And the rest of Meadowcreek, whether wearing red waistcoats or stammel petticoats, peeps in at the door and the windows and observes me from my boot-heels to my hat-band. O' my word, they can never before have seen a personable young man with a rapier!" This with a flashing glance at Nan Calderwood, to catch the involuntary look of disgust he guessed would come at this self-commendation; her eyes were fixed on her trencher, but the set of her lips and the little movement of her level brows witnessed to what he expected.

"So they put us all to our trial, and they fine the poor bitch that kept the ordinary for that she drew wine, not being an accredited tapster, and suffered the four of us—and she a defenceless woman!—drink beyond the due limit; and two other of my comrades—Trull and Hayne, if my memory hits it aright—they must pay because they drank too long,—both they and the hostess pay for the same offence; 'sdeath! the colony should speedily grow rich by such thrifty practices—and the long Scotch knave, Crozier, he, it seems, was drunk, else he had never spoken sedition—"

"Master Trescott's Rinyon, Nate?" Nan Calderwood interrupted. "He was brought before you and sentenced? His master will never pay the fine. Nate, he will not have to be whipped?"

"Why not, child?"

"I told you 'twas he helped me over the creek last March when the tides ran high and I had adventured. He was very careful of me. I should be loath to think of him at the whipping-post."

"Now confound me if a little charity be not due unto me!" Christopher put in, with a face that was piteous and abused, all but the eyes. "The others who were taken in the gin came off lightly, while I was judged a drunkard and a brawler and a *boute-feu* in general, and so soundly rattled by my good

uncle — I crave your pardon, sir, by the majesty of the Court — that 'struth! my ears still tingle for it. And in the end they stripped me of all save one sixpence." He flipped the coin out of his pocket and began spinning it on the table by his trencher. "Won't you compassionate my state and lend me one crown piece, uncle?" There was a curious blending of drollery and shrewdness in the glance he shot at Calderwood.

"Not to-day," the Magistrate answered, and, pushing by his empty trencher, rose from table.

"Then, till my luck swings round, I must chalk up a score on the hatch of the alehouse," Christopher flung back, and, tossing the sixpence in his hand, sauntered forth at the outer door.

The boys of the household slipped after him, and the three serving-men tramped out to labor; they, too, were interested in the stranger's discourse, perhaps because, not a week before, Calderwood had set one of them, Peter Harwood, to do extra tasks as a penalty for swearing. Yet, spite of the perniciousness of Christopher's example, the Magistrate watched his upright figure striding across the yard to the stable with something like friendliness, and when he spoke to Elizabeth there was tolerance in his voice, albe the words were grim: "Wild-Oats will think twice, I take it, ere he be drunk again in Meadowcreek."

"You fined him heavily, Nathan? And his first day amongst us!" lamented Elizabeth.

"I fined him but ten shillings; he could allege in his defence that he was no more than taking wine with his supper at the ordinary; and the Tithingman assailed him, being a stranger and a gentleman, somewhat over-zealously. But ten shillings did not satisfy my master, so when he heard Rinyon Crozier must go to the whipping-post, he pulled out his purse and quitted his fine, and then when Abigail Naylor began weeping, he paid hers, and the fines of the other two rogues for company's sake."

"'Twas like his father's generosity!" cried Mistress Calderwood, and Lucy, who, with a fine show of heeding nothing but her task, was helping Nan clear the table, whispered to her young aunt, "That was princely done. Confess it, now."

"Thou silly! he did it but to win your father's countenance." Nan scraped a trencher with vindictive taps of the knife. "Any rogue with the least touch of wit could see that Nate would love a man who did a generous deed."

Therein young Mistress Calderwood phrased her brother's mood with nice accuracy, but quite failed of understanding the impulse that moved him. It was not the scatter-headed generosity of the boy that stirred him to toleration of his unwelcome nephew, but, translating all action into his own terms, he chose to see in Christopher's conduct a penitent sense that he had been foremost in the disorder and a feeling for justice that made him take upon himself the whole punishment. So for those few hours, at least, Calderwood found it easier than he had hoped to treat his kinsman with sympathy, though he was rather surprised when, later in the afternoon, he caught himself in the complaisance of bidding the young man come out with him, if he would, to visit the ship *Gilliflower*.

Christopher, who had that morning been eager in questioning of the ship that rode in the harbor, seized on the invitation, spite of one rather biting jest to the effect that he hoped there was no court to snare him at the end of this journey. It was a rare blue afternoon with a rippling wind from off the water; the unknown country that spread about him was fresh and green; and his limbs, cramped for weeks in the strait compass of the merchantman, ached to be in action once more. He swung down the path that led through the cleared field to the shore, with a slash of his hat at a vagrant butterfly, a dive into a clump of bushes to snap off a red lily, all the robustious enjoyment of a June day and open country that Calderwood, tramping along in sober thought of the recaulking of his ship called "childish" and let go at that.

At the edge of the field, where the waves in the gales of winter had worn the slope to the form of a low bluff, the path went down between banks and buried itself in the sand of a narrow beach. A bold wooded headland on the right hand, a fending point on the left that swept out into the harbor, made here a sheltered cove, where a trim shallop swayed at anchor and, drawn well up the beach in the feathery rack of seaweed, rested two slender bark canoes. Christopher clapped into his mouth the last of a handful of wild strawberries and laid hold with Calderwood to launch one of the little craft. "May I row?" he asked, with an eagerness for labor that was unexpected.

"I'll paddle. 'Twill be enough if you sit still," the Magistrate answered, a shade anxiously.

But Christopher, spite of his companion's forebodings, held his restless body quiet as a stone, while from the bow where he had settled himself he watched the shore fall astern. All round the circle of the sky-line the green trees struggled up against the blue, — acute pine-tops, feathered hemlocks, the indistinct range of full-leaved trees, — and in squads and thin lines they pressed out, here and there, from the ranks of the forest and straggled into the open fields that lay about the Lastbrook farm. He was too newly come into the country to guess the labor that had gone to the making of that open plain, of the patches of cultivated ground, of the stanch, timbered house and strong outbuildings, but to his thinking the squares of young corn and barley and vegetables that started out from the duller green of the fields made a pleasant show, and on the knoll in the midst of the open, the house, with its projecting upper story, and the pine trees that had been suffered to stand about it, had a look of primitive well-being that took his fancy. There must be good hunting in those woods, and the little cousins were droll imps, and there were two winsome girls in the house; he was willing to bide out a half-year there, for all the man whom his grandfather had bidden harbor him was a solemn Puritan.

His eyes rested on Calderwood in the stern of the canoe, and in the contentment of the hour and the place he found him less forbidding; not only had the Magistrate slipped off his doublet, an action which put him on a level with careless humanity, but he was handling the paddle as if he enjoyed it. Christopher fell to questioning of the management of the canoe, with one of the flashes of sober sense that kept Calderwood perplexed as to whether he should treat him as a boy older than Jack or as a man younger than himself, and in such amiable converse they rounded the pine-covered headland into the greater bay of Meadowcreek.

"Yonder, now, rides a craft worth speaking of," Calderwood interrupted himself, and Christopher, shifting his position warily in the ticklish canoe, gazed eastward, where against the blue of sea and sky were outlined the black hull and naked spars of a stanch ship. "And that's the *Gilliflower*?" he questioned.

"That is the *Gilliflower*."

" 'There were three ladies on a road,
Gilliflower, gentle Rosemary,' "

Christopher half hummed. "A pretty name, sir, and a pretty craft, else you may truss me up at her yardarms! And she's yours?"

"A half interest is mine. A quarter is held by Constable Gleason, and the other quarter by Master Atherton. We built her in '47. She hath sailed once unto Malaga and twice to the Barbadoes." This in even, short delivery from Calderwood, between strokes.

"'Swounds! I would I might command her," Christopher broke silence, after a moment's study of the noble lines of the tall quarterdeck and curved bows, and of the masts that tapered to bold height. "Will you not commend me to the office, uncle?"

Calderwood showed no surprise, save for a quizzical lifting

of the brows that reminded Christopher of his scornful brown sister. "You must debate that with Enoch Gleason, cousin. The Constable's son hath been master of the *Gilliflower* her last voyage, and he's like to hold the office. For all he is of a bold spirit, he is a sober, trustworthy young fellow."

"And he hath to his father a rogue who hath been a Round-head soldier and makes his boast thereof," Christopher laughed lightly, yet with so subtle a change from his hail-fellow manner that only formal speech passed between the two men, till the canoe lay to by the gangway-ladder and they had scrambled to the deck of the *Gilliflower*.

The well-scoured planks glared whitely under the afternoon sun, and from the seams came a tarry smell, keener than that of the salt air. From beside the capstan a mongrel dog sprang up with a vindictive bark, and upon that sounded the clatter of a door, and a man, stepping out from the roundhouse, came striding toward the companion-ladder. "You keep your hour well, Master Calderwood," he cried loudly. "And now you're here to see, I'm sure you'll bear me out, sir. The ship doth not need recaulking, spite of what my father says."

By this the speaker had set foot upon the main deck, a young man, Christopher noted, not above six years his senior, with a burliness of figure that recalled the Constable Gleason, though his sea-gait was his own. By nature he seemed of a light favor, but much sunburning had darkened his skin, save for the whiter streak across the forehead where his cap had pressed. His light mustache curled wirily, and in the whole man, both in his bold, open face and his studiedly rough and negligent dress, was a confidence and swagger that set Christopher abristle. It wanted but that Captain Gleason, at Calderwood's introduction, should greet him in a meaning tone, "Ay, to be sure, we have already heard tell of Master Ferringham."

After that, even the fact that the Captain, bidding them into the great cabin, brought out a bottle of ripe Madeira, could not

warm Christopher to good fellowship with the Roundhead's son. He made his civil excuses, and, leaving the two Meadowcreek men to discuss their business, strolled out upon the deck, where he talked with the shipkeeper, and won the mongrel dog to friendliness, and then, since his uncle still delayed, propped elbows on the bulwark and studied Meadowcreek village that ambled along the shore to westward. On his right hand massed the thick woods that lay between the village and Lastbrook cove; on his left trailed away the lush green marshes, at the edge of which the creek that gave the town its name flooded out into the harbor; and from right to left, along the sky, ran a low line of ragged hills. At their base the village straggled unevenly for perhaps a mile, and the watcher sought to pick one toy house from the other. That largest one, where the cottages stood thickest, was the barn-like meeting-house which his uncle had pointed out to him, and over opposite, across the thread of white lane, stood the alehouse of which he kept good remembrance.

Just there Calderwood and the Captain came forth at last from the cabin. The older man was silent, but Gleason, as one convinced against his will, still held out. "Under your favor, sir, I maintain none the less that she can sail once more without recaulking," he was protesting.

"Body a' truth! she'll sail to the bottom, then," Christopher tossed in a word. "The seams are starting; I could see't as we lay to; any Jack could see't."

"So you're a sailor maybe, sir?" Gleason turned on him, with the sneer scarcely concealed.

"But so so, Captain," the young man drawled. "I served four years in Prince Rupert's fleet."

Calderwood's momentary surprise and Gleason's nonplussed silence gave Christopher a triumph that lasted him till he and his uncle were about to put off from the side of the ship. Then it was, as he took up the spare paddle, bent to share in the sport himself, that above him he caught Gleason's voice: "Com-

mend my services to my mistress Nan, and tell her I shall assuredly be with her to-morrow afternoon."

Glancing upward, Christopher saw the Captain leaning against the bulwark; his cassock hung unfastened, and on his face was an aggressive confidence that made Ferringham strike the paddle into the water with a noisy splash. "What in the devil's name hath that chuff to do with Mistress Calderwood?" he rapped out, as soon as the canoe had fallen away from the side of the *Gilliflower*.

"The young man is the son of my friend," Calderwood answered, in so dry a tone that thereafter Christopher paddled in silence. White clouds were now tumbling up in the west, and the waves were running higher, so it took strength for an unskilled arm to swing a paddle, and in the struggle he found some vent for his ill temper.

Yet the vexation that this arrogant Captain Gleason should be sure of the brown girl's favor stayed by him, so that later, in the twilight after supper, he made opportunity to sound his admiring cousin Lucy as to what truth propped up the assumption. So Enoch Gleason was a good friend to them all, he insinuated, and Lucy assured him that he was, — friend to all and especially to Nan. He and Nan, and Benjie Trescott, the minister's son, and she — well, people did say, but people say many things, but did not Cousin Christopher deem Enoch a well-favored, gallant fellow? Christopher swore that he was Enoch Gleason's servant, and sauntered away to smoke his pipe and hold communion with the cheerful, squint moon.

Possibly Lucy had the custom of telling her room-mate all that she heard; in any case, next morning Nan Calderwood was in provokingly good spirits. Enoch was coming, she announced, and she had not seen him for four days, so, as long as Christopher lingered in the kitchen, she went humming about her work in a gleeful manner that drew a rebuke from her sister-in-law. "Truly, Nan," Elizabeth protested, when at last the women were alone at their tasks, "your bearing is

unseemly. You fairly go about to put slights on Christopher Ferringham."

Nan adjusted her largest apron to her trim waist and smiled at the hem inscrutably.

"And he so good a lad and like his father —"

"Had your brother the custom of swearing between every two words and telling you how often he had been drunk?" the girl murmured.

Elizabeth's face flushed never so slightly. "You must remember Christopher is not all a Ferringham; he inherits some qualities from the distaff side. And his mother was a minx."

"Still I doubt if 'twere of her he learned his merry tricks," Nan cast a parting shot before she went about her morning task, which was to shell for dinner a first mess of pease. She stepped out upon the broad doorstep, where the black currant bushes cast a little shade, and, settling herself with the pail beside her, fell to work. Off on her left toward the ploughed fields she saw the three older lads sauntering away to some sport of their own without Master Ferringham. She was glad of that; a brawling, foul-mouthed rascal such as he was no comrade for her adored nephews. She smiled a little, both for the pleasant certainty of his absence and for the remembrance of how she had answered her sister-in-law, and, still smiling, she glanced up and saw Christopher coming toward her from the stable.

With the smile quite gone, she drew the pail to her so he might cross the step, but a pace or two off he halted. "May I sit down here?" he asked bluntly. "My uncle hath been hinting that I be an idler. I asked him i' the Lord's name what would he have me to do? and he answered me whatsoever honest labor I first came upon. In a direct line from the stable, this is the first labor I find waiting me. May I help you?"

His words were humble, but there was in his face a gleam of mirth that made her aware she would amuse him mightily by

a stiff refusal. She scooped a great heap of the pods into her apron and, pushing the pail toward him, said in a chill tone, "You are free to help."

For a time the two sat upon the doorstone, with the pail between them, in a silence unbroken save for the crisp snap of the pods. Once Christopher ventured, "'Tis a rare day," and again, "'Tis a fair quiet place here at your brother's house; I never dwelt in such a place before." Both remarks she let pass with a cold monosyllable, and then, as he gave a very little sigh and relapsed into busy silence, her conscience reproached her. Once, and even twice, as she shook over her lapful of pease, she glanced at him, with intent to let him see that, though she stood upon her dignity, she was willing to meet him a quarter on the way, if he really chose to be civil. But it was not till the third glance that their eyes met; he was just clapping into his mouth a handful of raw pease, and, catching her look of surprise, he smiled, and involuntarily she smiled back. "Do you like them?" she asked.

"I've eat worse," he answered. "Not ten months ago I was so hungry I could take a crust out o' the kennel and eat it, and for raw cabbages, I asked nothing better. You'll understand, mistress, they don't feed cates to prisoners of war."

"My brother said you had been a soldier," she replied, and then, as he seemed about to resume his respectful silence, questioned civilly, "How long did you serve?"

"Some fifteen years," answered Christopher, scooping out a podful of pease with a dexterous thumb. "Did I hear you say you doubted it? Truth, though! I've been in the camp all my life, save for those first five years at Ferringhurst. You'll understand, my father was a second son, and he elected to be a soldier, and he had the good fortune to win the favor of Buckingham, so he was preferred to hold a commission in the troops at the Court. There he met my mother; she was one of her Majesty's gentlewomen; Isabel Fitzgerald was her name, of the Limerick Fitzgeralds. And when I was born,

they sent me into the country to be kept at nurse, where Aunt Bess and Lady Mary, my grandmother, spoiled me arrantly, I make no doubt, and then — Do I vex you with talking?"

"No," the girl nodded. "So little hath befallen me, so little happens here, I would fain know how other folk have lived and borne a part in the world and seen somewhat."

"'Slife! I've seen and to spare the last fifteen years," he took up the story. "When I was little more than five, it was, they sent for me, and a serving-man carried me to London on the pommel of his saddle, I squalling lustily the first ten miles. But when we came to London I speedily was good friends with my mother. 'Struth! she was beautiful, — black hair and such blue eyes as you never saw, nor ever will see. I remember she cried out loudest at the stout, country-made shoes I wore, and bought me brave clothes of blue satin and pumps, and taught me to walk into a room without stumbling, and to dance. Your preachers say that dancing is abomination, I know. But when they say the word *dance*, do you know what I see? The parlor in the house at London, the wainscoting black oak and very old, and the sconces making little pools of light on the floor, and my father sits where it is dusky, playing his viol, and my mother, with her arms bare and her blue eyes shining, is bending over me and holding my fist and teaching me 'right foot, left foot' and 'turn and bow.'"

He was silent for an instant; yes, he was telling her truths, Nan felt. At first he had spoken as if with a thought merely to amuse her, but his tone now had grown earnest. "Then the Scots War broke out, and ever since it hath been war in England. My mother died while my father was in the North, and then he carried me with him to the camp. There was no other place. His father would have none of him, because he held to the king whose bread he had eaten; and my mother's kindred all were soldiers too. So I went with him to Oxford, — he had the colonelcy of a troop of horse, — and I lived in his

quarters and ate at the mess table. When I bore myself well, one of his captains, Blandford Carewe, would give me a glass of claret and stand me up on a stool to drink 'God for King Charles, and Pym and the Parliament to hell!' And when I was a little older I was to have a sword and ride in my father's troop, but there came Marston Moor. Blandford brought my father out of the battle, and he fetched me from the baggage wagons, Blandford himself with his head all dripping blood, and I saw my father die."

Another instant of silence in which Nan, sitting with hands idle, blinked rapidly; she gave small thought to the Cavalier colonel, dead on the field, but her heart ached for that forlorn little boy, younger even than Jack Calderwood, scarce older than little Nathan.

"My father commended me to Blandford Carewe," Christopher resumed, with sudden liveliness. "By this light! he was a proper fellow, Blandford. A short, black scrub of a man, but a' could fight like three, and 'sblood! he was the devil with women. We quitted England the next year, for he sided with Prince Rupert when the breach with the King came, and he commanded a ship in the Prince's fleet. And we plundered on the Irish coast, and we fought 'em on the Mediterranean. 'Swounds! but those were the days. But Blandford quarrelled with the Prince; he'd bear affronts from no man,—a blow and a word afterward it was with Blandford,—and the Prince had ordered our ship to be dismantled; 'twas scurvily done, for she was a stanch keel. So we shifted for ourselves, out-at-elbow always those months, and hungry, too, many times. But I've beat the roads in half Europe, and I can swear in six languages and some odd dialects, and that, save with weapons, is the only schooling I've ever had, and 'sdeath! 'tis not so ill neither. At the last we brought our velvet rags and our swords into the Low Countries to the court of Charles II, where the loyal folk were mustering for the expedition into England. Blandford got a

captaincy, and I rode under him, a gentleman trooper. Most of us that were privates were gentlemen, and cursed good fellows too!"

The pease in the pail were all shelled; Christopher thrust it aside and, moving along the doorstone to Nan, began shelling those which she held in her lap. "So we sailed forth unto Scotland and so marched into England, and the men that should have risen durst not — God confound them for cowards! — but stood off and scowled on us. And at Worcester that spawn of hell, Noll Cromwell, spurring at our heels, came up with us. They beat us out of the town — the horse bore the brunt of it — just dust in your throat, and the blood starting hot, and the swords biting into you, and horses falling, and men going down. Then a squad of us were out in the open, — we'd cut our way through — and I had Blandford before me on my saddle, he lying back in my arms a-dying, and I brought him off just as he brought my father —"

A quaver that at another time were ridiculous broke Christopher's voice; he bent his head as if busied with his work, but Nan could see his eyelashes were wet, no feigning. She half put out her hand to him. "Prithee, tell what happened to you," she bade, in what she tried to make a casual tone.

"We had to pull up," he answered in a lower voice. "We stopped at a shed in the fields, Ned Burrell that was corporal in the troop, he stayed and three others; we stayed with Blandford. And then when 'twas done and we were getting to horse, came up a body of militia and seized on us, proud as if they'd snared a whole troop, and haled us off cross country and through their towns. Do you know that women are worse devils than men when a man is down? They'll taunt you worse and stone you too. At the last they huddled us into a great walled garden, at Elnwick near Ferringhurst, two score and more of us, mostly from Blandford's troop. They'd stripped us nearly to our shirts, and for food we ate the raw cabbages in the garden. The militia captain that guarded us was a knave

named Bulward that had been a butcher. He had a fair wife back in '43, too fair for him; she had the wit to prefer Blandford. So he hated us all because we had ridden in Blandford's troop.

"One day Ned Burrell and I, we were boiling a cabbage in a pannikin, — the only dish in the squad, but Ned was a powerful big fellow, and I've ever been a handy lad with my fists, so none could get it from us. While we were cooking, swaggers in this Bulward — his men kept guard along the wall with muskets and pikes, so he was brave — in his warm clothes, after his good dinner — damn his smug face! And he jeers at us for a lot of sorry curs and tells us that next week we are to be sent to the Guinea coast and sold to work in the mines along with the negars and be flogged like them. As he turns on his heel, the grin still on his face, he comes within arm's reach of me, where I stood against the wall, and I looked him in the eyes and began whistling *Cuckold, come dig*. He out with his sword and — God forgive him! — he took the sharp of it and struck at my head. I just caught it across my arm, and down I went in the mire. At that Ned Burrell catches me up the pannikin and hurls it and takes Bulward a blow in the head. Then the lads know we'll all be punished in any case, so they all fall to't. Some wrested pikes from the guards, and then the musketeers fired into the thick of us. There were a half-score killed without a chance, but Burrell and two others broke through out of the garden and got away clear, God be thanked for't! 'Twas a vengeance brave fight, and I — good Lord! I was bleeding there in the mud like a stuck calf!

"'Twas my grandfather found me there. He was of the Quorum, and in time of peace you can't kill men, even malignants, unquestioned. He posted thither at news of the riot, and they dragged me out from beneath a dead man to show him the villain that had bred the strife, and, one of my comrades telling my name, he looked on me and knew me. He ransomed me and carried me to Ferringhurst, I as good as dead

to all seeming, but they patched me up again. I bear the scars still, though." He slipped the doublet down from his left shoulder and, stripping up his shirt-sleeve, held out his arm. Across the white flesh Nan saw the red weal of a shocking sword scar, and, with she knew not what of pity and indignation, she caught her breath. He was such a boy to be so abused!

"And there's a braver one still on my head, though my hair hides it." Christopher leaned a little toward her, with his neck bowed. "Give me your hand, so. Now feel." The strong grasp of his fingers on her wrist thrilled her whole body; passively she yielded as he guided and let her hand press his hair. Beneath she could feel the furrow of the scar, and she felt, too, that his hair was soft.

"Why, Nan!" spoke an amazed voice from the doorway behind her. Turning quickly, she met Lucy's gaze, and that instant some words she had spoken two nights before recurred to her. The blood came stinging into her face; she dropped her eyes, and met Christopher's glance, insolent and unabashed, that said so plainly, "You wouldn't touch me, eh?" that in sick shame and anger she judged Lucy had borne him tales. With harsh clatter Nan snatched up the pail of pease, and, gathering her skirts about her that they might not brush the young man, swept by him into the kitchen.

For a time Christopher sat upon the doorstep, with his hands limp between his knees, and whistled beneath his breath, then at length stood up and stretched himself. "Methinks I'll go play now," he muttered. "'Fore George! I've worked pestilence hard this morning."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE HABITATIONS OF THE WICKED

SOME twenty minutes later Christopher had shifted into doublet and breeches of rough gray frieze,—Pritchard had fetched his mails to the house the night before,—and, with his fowling-piece under his arm and a bulge to one pocket that suggested bread and cheese, stepped out again upon the doorstep. An instant his eyes ranged about in search of Ferringham Calderwood, *alias* Jack,—he wondered what domestic revolt against the Ferringham tradition lay beneath the rechristening,—but the boy, whom he judged to be waiting courteously for a second invitation to go shooting, was nowhere in sight. Christopher set out alone through the house-yard, but, in a last hope to find his cousin, turned from the beaten cart-path that led away into the pines on his left, and headed through the meagre grass toward the cultivated fields. He tramped slowly, for on the shadeless upland the mid-morning sun beat untempered; the grass shimmered in the heat; the shrill creak of a locust and, now and again, yonder in the corn-fields, a distant halloo, reëchoed drowsily.

Of a sudden, as he neared a wiry clump of young pines that grew at the verge of the cornfield, he caught another sound that made him stand—the unmistakable sobbing of a child. Straightway from the shelter of the trees William's slender little figure appeared; one small arm was crooked to hide his face, and, thus blinded, he came stumbling through the grass, sobbing and struggling to master his sobs. Christopher quickened his pace and, alongside the child in a half-

dozen strides, caught the little fellow to him. "What's amiss, 'bird Willie'?" he coaxed. "Tell me."

William shook his brown head, with a furtive, manly effort to wipe his wet eyes, then helplessly buried his face against his comforter's doublet, and choked out, "He—he did flog me but now; my father, he flogged me."

"Flogged you? 'Swounds!"

"Don't!" William wailed sharply. "'Twas for that."

"In Heaven's name, for what, lad?"

"For that. Because I said it—what you said. He did flog me."

"Flogged you because you swore?" Christopher repeated impatiently. "What a plague! What harm doth it do any one?" He scowled perplexedly down at the child, though he still kept his arm about the little one's shoulders, and presently, as he listened to the muffled sobs, he shifted his feet. "Well, I'm thinking if you're going to catch up my words and pull this upon yourself, I'll have to school my tongue," he blurted out. "Come, come, don't cry, Willie. Here, you shall have this, if you'll cease crying." He pressed a bit of money into the boy's hand. "Go buy you a Banbury cake."

William looked up, smearing a not over-clean fist across his wet cheeks. "What's a Bambury cake?" His voice still was shaky.

"Why, there are plums in it and honey and spice, and—and other things," Christopher explained. "It is right good, and one eats it at seven years old, and sometimes when one is older."

"I never saw one." William shook his head.

"Then buy gingerbread. Or don't they even bake that in this pestilence hole? Now afore Heaven!—"

The sound of quick footsteps swishing through the grass from the cornfield made Christopher look up, and he came face to face with Calderwood. The Magistrate still grasped in his hand the frayed end of a birch rod, and his face, Christopher

noted, no longer wore for him the look of toleration that it had shown in the last four and twenty hours, but was set in the cold anger of their first encounter.

"Run hence, William," Calderwood bade sternly, and, scarcely doing his nephew the honor of pausing beside him, addressed him in a low tone: "I must request you, sir, to keep yourself from all conversation with my sons till you can teach them somewhat other than profanity and ribaldry." Then he strode away through the wavering heat of the upland toward the house, and Christopher, with the blood burning in his cheeks, for a moment stood watching him go; he saw how the green grass was crushed under Calderwood's shoes, and he noted the relentless set of the man's shoulders.

As if he started awake again, Christopher suddenly flung about on his heel, and, head down, trudged furiously toward the dark woods before him. The loosestrife and bilberry bushes and sumac, all the scrub growth of the edge of the forest, he crushed aside from his path and left behind him. The dense shade of big-boled oaks and shimmery birches shut in about him, but still he pressed forward blindly. Now he slipped upon smooth pine needles, and now, deeper and deeper in the woods, he scuffled and lost footing on a steep ridge, thick with sand. In one hollow he splashed through a swampy tangle, where black bog-water oozed about his shoes, and on the farther edge he plunged into a wide tract of beech and chestnut trees, where the undergrowth twined serriedly. The sunlight fell sparsely through the branches above him, but he was burning hot with the anger that was on him, and the farther and the more fiercely he tramped, the angrier he grew. "'Fore George! I'll give Master Puritan something to complain on now, sink my soul else!" he vowed.

So intent was he on anathematizing his kinsman that he gave less and less heed to his steps, and thus it chanced that on the downward slope of a pine-covered ridge he stumbled over an exposed root. In flinging out his arm to save himself, he must

have caught the lock of his fowling-piece in a fold of his doublet, for as he pitched forward he heard a cracking report.

The blue flecks of sky between the plummy branches blended and wavered before his eyes. Dizzily he sat up among the pine needles. A damp spot, two damp spots, were upon them, and his stocking clung wetly to his leg. "Damme! I've shot myself into the leg," Christopher spoke fretfully to the trees about him. Near half the charge must have torn through the calf, and the wound was bleeding gayly; he unbuckled his belt and strapped it tightly above the hurt, then with his handkerchief set to stanching the blood. "Cursed stupid!" he grumbled, and when he unaccountably felt too weak to touch the hurt further and dropped back full length on the pine needles, lay cursing the gun and the root of the tree and his leg and his own doltish clumsiness, till breath failed him.

The sun no longer hung straight over him, but, slipping a little downward, sent through the pine branches a long ray that flickered irritatingly across his face. "What the vengeance!" complained Christopher. "I'm thirsty; I want some water. 'Sblood! I'd liefer have water than wine. And I'm not like to get it 'less I go seek it."

Fumblingly he bound the handkerchief about his leg, then scrambled to his feet, and, after three staggering steps, fell again. A time longer he lay quiet, till once more he was master of his shaken body, then, shoving before him the fowling-piece, set himself, with increased wariness, to crawling down the hillside. The pine needles crumbled beneath his fingers; once, when he had to pause and lay down his head, he felt them warm against his cheek. The pines yielded at last to a growth of cool brakes, and the ground felt damp. He was in the depth of the hollow, where abrupt hillocks, thick set with trees, rose upon three sides,—the very place for a brook to flow, but there was no brook.

Christopher put his spinning head down on his sound knee and swore piteously, then, setting his teeth, began on hands

and knees to drag himself down the hollow. He could not lie there, he reasoned disjointedly; he must have a drink or choke, and then he must go home. That was maybe four miles distant, maybe six, but he hoped it was four. All the way as he came, he had met no living creature. Drag himself four miles with a wounded leg! For a moment Christopher ceased his effort, and, outstretched among the clammy brakes, lay motionless and hopeless.

Then he told himself grimly that no one of his pious kindred was like to come seek his rogueship, and, with something of his former dogged anger, once more haled himself forward. Foot by foot he crept down the hollow; the brakes dwindled; he had to work his way up a slight declivity and roll, quivering with pain, down the next hill-slope. There must be water somewhere near, for he could hear frogs pipe, but he could see little in the dusk of the valley. For the sun was now setting; the long shadows closed chilly about him, and with the drawing in of night something shamefully near to alarm seized upon Christopher. He had not been a week in Massachusetts; by experience he knew next to nothing of the country, but on the voyage thither he had listened to wild tales in plenty. Bears and wolves lurked in the woods, he knew, and there were Indians. Painfully and slowly, for his strength was going, he recharged the fowling-piece, and, dragging himself to a great oak in the depth of the hollow, set his shoulders against it.

All about him the valley now was dusky, and in the dusk he had a light-headed fancy that vague shapes, lurking behind the tree trunks, peered at him. He shut his eyes against the sight. His head ached dully, and his leg, untended, throbbed with a pain that shot through all his body. His mouth was parched, and his lips, for all he tried to moisten them with his tongue, were cracking. "I must get home; 'sdeath! I *must*," he groaned, but the strength to move a handbreadth farther no longer was in him.

Above him the sky turned purple, and against it the inter-

twisting branches of the trees made black lines. Off in the lonely thickets an owl laughed, "Ho-o! ho-ho-ho!" and in the deeper stillness that succeeded, sounded a faint crackle of bushes. The perspiration prickled on the back of Christopher's neck, and he gripped the fowling-piece. Again out of the dusk came the crackling, and with it now a surly mutter that grew audible as a hearty English curse.

Christopher gave a weak gasp of relief; then raised his voice in so faint a call that he was amazed: "Halloo! Help!"

An instant there was dead silence in the blackening forest; then he heard an answering hail and again the crackling of bushes, louder and louder, yet still distant and slow. His head dropped back on the ground, and his eyes, closing, lost sight even of the dim sky. Near him now sounded footsteps, and an arm, slipped beneath his shoulders, raised him slightly. "Gude faith! 'tis the callant that beat the Tithingman," spoke a voice he had heard before.

"Rinyon Crozier." Christopher half unclosed his eyes in childish relief at finding his rescuer one of whom he had some knowledge. "It's my leg."

He felt a hand fumble lightly across the rude bandage, then the Scotchman bade, "Lend a hand hither, Dearmont. Lift him up."

"Calderwood's nephew, is it?" growled a sulky voice right above them. "Let him lie here till he rots!"

"Na, we're going to carry him til the hemmel," Crozier repeated unmoved; he lifted Christopher by the shoulders, and the other man, albe still grumbling, raised his legs. The sky overhead was dark, Christopher saw, and then the twigs snapped so close to his face that he was glad to shut his eyes, and he thought on little else than the pain of his hurt, for the fellow who held his legs did not bear him so gently as did Crozier.

Then for a time he was vexed by thought of nothing, till he felt on his face the dampness of cold water, and through his

closed eyelids caught a red flicker of light. Above him, when he opened his eyes, he saw a low roof, and by the smoky light of a pitch-pine torch made out three men who were gathered round him,—a heavy-jawed young fellow, whom he judged the second of his bearers, the man called Webb Hayne, and, kneeling beside him, the tall Scotch bondman, Crozier. They had laid him down on a bed of pine boughs; his face was wet and his shirt flung open. His childishness in fainting angered him, and he struggled to sit up alertly, but Crozier held him down and made him swallow a draught of villanous aqua vitæ.

The spirits half strangled him, but they put some heart into him. "I'm but little hurt, eh?" he addressed the bystanders, with an effort at briskness.

"Nigh half a score o' goose-shot in the thick o' your leg, master," spoke Hayne, and the heavy-jawed man, with real zest, added, "They ought to be dug out, and no time wasted, neither."

Gripping Crozier's arm, Christopher pulled himself erect; his stocking was down, and he could see, where they had washed the blood from his leg, the small, ugly pits of the wounds. "Vengeance on't! hold the light so I can see fairly," he swore, and then: "Ay, they must be carved out o' me, and as well now as any time. You cut 'em out, Crozier."

The Scotchman turned his imperturbable gray eyes upon him. "'Twill hurt ye, laddie."

"Don't I know it?" Christopher snapped. "Take my knife. It may be sharper than yours."

He wished the two other men would not look on with such impersonal interest; he wanted to lie down again, but under so many eyes he would not yield to weakness. Instead, he braced himself rigidly on one elbow, and, with forced curiosity, watched Crozier's every movement, saw him bring a bucket of water from one corner of the shanty, saw him fetch rags for bandages, and watched, still unflinchingly, even when the Scotchman at last knelt beside him, knife in hand.

Then for a space he dared not glance at the knife nor the man who plied it, but, with hands clenched, stared on the shadow from the torch that wavered up and down the rough wall. Hayne, who held the torch, was bending low to light Crozier at his work, and behind Hayne, in the shadow, lowered the heavy-jawed man they called Dearmont Killion. Christopher's eyes dropped to Crozier's earnest face, bright in the torchlight, and he noted how the pulse throbbed in his temple, and tried to count the beats — anything that he might not think on the darts of pain that were searching every fibre of him, on the knife that was biting into his living flesh. But in his own despite his eyes rested at last on the blade, on the dribbling wounds that were smearing his leg, and from them he looked up suddenly at the two men who peered down so eager for his first sign of weakening. "'Swounds!" the cry broke from him. "A man cannot breathe here. Get you out, or get you to the devil! I can hold the light. Give't me. Send them away, Rinyon."

"Ye'd best go," Crozier bade, and, taking the torch from Hayne, stuck it in the ground. But as the spectators went grudgingly forth into the dark, Christopher dragged himself up sitting, and, snatching the pine splinter, held it out so the light fell across his hurt leg. "I can hold it for you," he panted.

Hold it he did, for all the agony that racked his body, till the hut went whirling round him, and the light of not one, but twenty torches streaked through the air. Out of a haze in the far distance Rinyon Crozier drawled, "'Tis done, lad," and only then did Christopher sink down limply on his bed.

Crozier lifted him up and gave him to drink, all the water he could swallow, and bandaged his leg with silent carefulness. He was not of the breed of Hayne and Killion, Christopher knew, and so, when the Scotchman at the last was spreading an old cloak over him, he caught his sleeve and begged, "Don't leave me, Rinyon. I want you to stay with me to-night."

The other nodded dispassionately, and indeed, through all the feverish hours, Christopher was sure in his waking moments to find him at his side. Did he want a drink, did he want the bandages about his swollen leg moistened again, Crozier was alert to do his bidding. "Y'are a cursed good fellow!" Christopher muttered each time, for all the unvarying answer he received was, "Haud your tongue now, and sleep."

Not till it was hard upon daybreak did he take that sound advice, and then he slipped from his restless napping into a slumber so deep that it must have been hours ere he woke. Voices he was first aware of — disputing voices that had roused him. Then he realized that a roof of boughs which let in chinks of light bent low above him; he watched a shaft of sunshine that, sliding in at the narrow door, slipped across the floor of dirt and was lost upon the osiered wall above his head; and at last he remembered it was a hut called the hemmel in which he lay disabled, and just without the door it was his hosts who spoke, and it was he himself over whom they wrangled.

"Tell 'ee, it is na safe," one complained. "There'll be hue and cry made after him."

"D'ye think the springald hath cut a purse?" drawled Crozier's voice.

"He'll blab where the hemmel stands; make him promise," interrupted Killion.

"And say the rogue die on our hands," the querulous one took up his plaint. "What'll we —"

Christopher propped himself on one arm. "Come in here!" he raised his voice. "What the vengeance! Come in hither, I say!"

An instant, and they came, — Crozier, stooping slightly in the shoulders, at the head, then Killion, black-browed and aggressive, and Hayne, alert like a wood animal, and the pock-pitted man whom Christopher remembered as Ziba Trull, and, at the rear, flapping his hat before his red face, the rotund Benoni Pritchard.

"Which one of you was booby enough to think a man would die because he was let blood i' the leg a little?" Christopher demanded. "Not you, Ziba Trull? 'Sdeath! you're more a fool than you look, man. This 'rogue' doth not make worms' meat so readily. And you, Killion, bear in mind that a gentleman doth not peach on his hosts. If you wish your house to be private, renounce me if I've the will to blab!"

For a little space the five shifted their positions with uneasy glances at one another; then Crozier spoke out, "Ye'll ken, sir, this hemmel here, we hae planted it on land that is na ours, — on Master Calderwood's land. It sitteth well from his house and thick i' the woods. We do na fash him, nor doth any chiel fash us —"

"If you choose to come hither and be merry, eh?" Christopher asked, with an appreciative laugh that the others reëchoed uncertainly.

"So you won't be telling your uncle, master?" begged Trull. "We'll say we found you in the woods, and carry you to him —"

"Hang me if you will!" Christopher took him up. "My uncle can whistle for me. I'm going to stay here." Then, as his hearers looked blank, he vouchsafed: "I know you all, lads. You're what the pious ones of the town call sons of perdition and children of Belial, eh? and hunt you out into the woods if you would drink a friendly glass or rattle a dicebox? Well, my kinsfolk have given me to understand I'm one of the same stripe, so I'm very fain of your company. And I'll say naught of you or of your hemmel, if you'll say to no soul in Meadowcreek that I am here. Come, you'll keep close mouths?"

Crozier gazed at him curiously, but the three others, with one accord, wheeled on Benoni Pritchard. "You're to hold your tongue, you'll mark," admonished Trull, and Killion sneered, "But he'll go prattle to his wife."

"What hath the woman to do with me?" grunted Benoni.

"Did she not yesternight with her own viperous hands smash me a fair bottle of comfortable sack? Heed you an old man's counsel, Master Ferringham, and never take you a wife."

"Not while wenches are to be had." Christopher dropped down again on his pine bed. "And, look you here, you've no need to set 'master' before my name. When I'm with lads o' life, I've ever been called Kester Ferringham."

Thus was Christopher, under the curt by-name he had borne in the riotous days before Worcester, made free of the company of the chosen ruffianage of Meadowcreek. They welcomed him heartily; for though Trull and Killion were a bit dubious when they realized his pockets were bare, and Pritchard and Hayne grew more familiar, still, penniless or no, Christopher was the Magistrate's nephew, who had beaten the Tithingman and yet had gone unpunished.

To the respect due to his known fighting quality, to his connection with those in authority, which might serve also to screen his comrades, was added by the masters of the hemmel something hardly deep enough for friendliness, rather a curiosity to hear what this stranger could say, a desire to pour their own old stories into new ears, that made him never lack attendance. Trull had a cabin, and a wife, too; Hayne and Killion shared some sort of poor hovel in the village; and Crozier served an exacting master; yet one or another contrived to be with the injured man by day and by night. Undeniably Christopher made himself a good companion; his tongue went at a gallop in such side-splitting narrations that his hosts swallowed it in silence when, as the mood took him, he chaffed or swore at them; his tobacco, the bale of dice he bore in his pocket, were at their service, and he himself was ready to throw a main with them, to bear a hand in the game, when Trull's battered deck of cards was in evidence, to drink at their can while the liquor lasted.

They all were friends together, more or less speedily, according to each man's nature. The surly Killion, even by the second day, told Christopher he was not cut of his uncle's pattern —

a compliment which Christopher accepted as the heavy-jawed man's apology for his cool proposal to abandon him in the woods. From that Dearmont went on to curse the Magistrate with an earnestness that made Christopher's wrath against his uncle seem tame. He knew whereof he spoke, Heavy-Jaws repeated; he had been a servant in the Magistrate's household, — a poor scrubby lad, sent from London with other wretched brats in the *Seabridge* to be sold at five pounds a head to such masters as chose to purchase. Calderwood had bought his time. "And 'tis walk a straight course, with a wannion! in his house, or your back pays the scot," Killion snarled. "But I led him such a dance a' was glad to turn me off a year before my time." No man was his master now, he bragged; he worked when he chose, at harvest or planting time, and had made one coastwise voyage with Captain Gleason — "A tall stringer and ready with his fists; a' is another hard one to serve," added Killion, — but most whiles he lived by his fowl-ing-piece, — and his neighbors' gardens, Christopher made a shrewd guess.

Webb Hayne, his house-mate, proved of a repute almost as ill. He had been bred a poacher in England, Christopher would have sworn, and, drifting by some chance into Massachusetts, would fain shirk every settled labor to beat the forest. He knew all the trails and fords in eastern Massachusetts as well as any Indian, Killion told Christopher; truth, he was half an Indian himself. Sometimes he dwelt with the savages for weeks, and he had a squaw among them who cooked clams so well you never could get enough. Christopher tried to coax the ex-poacher to speak of the wild places he had travelled and of the savages with whom he was familiar, but the little sunburnt man, save when in liquor, was reticent. Yet at last he was won to so much friendliness that he fetched the young gentleman a fledgling hawk, the best sort of falcon that Massachusetts bred, he assured him, and on the theme of falconry his tongue rattled briskly enough.

Rinyon Crozier was left the one monument of taciturnity, and it was of him that Christopher was most eager to learn. Already he knew he was one of the Scotch soldiers captured at Dunbar whom Cromwell had sold into New England, but beyond that there was at first no wringing information from Crozier. He was very kind to Christopher, — quite naturally, the young man judged, since he had saved the fellow from a whipping, — but with that in his manner which suggested that he respected not Ferringham's gentility, but the man himself. It amused Christopher that, where the others readily called him by his curt nickname, Kester, Rinyon Crozier chose to call him by the Scotch diminutive, Christie. The fellow liked him, plainly, but along with the liking went a cool assumption of equality that made Ferringham open eyes of amazement.

A man of contradictions, too, this Crozier. One sunny day when Christopher, recovered enough to hobble forth into the narrow yard close screened before the hemmel, was playing at shuffle-cap with Killion and Hayne, he chanced to ask for the Scotchman and was told: "Why, he hath gone to the meeting like a right Banbury-man. 'Tis the Sabbath, so Rinyon hath washed his hands and gone sit i' the meeting-house." Yet that evening Crozier, with the calmest of faces, told Christopher he thought to spend the night at the hemmel, and in the morning would explain to Master Trescott that he had been seeking a stray sheep.

"Now hang me but you use strange shifts for a pious, church-going fellow!" chuckled Christopher, in a tone that moved Crozier to reply: "My mither was a pious body; she was ganging to the kirk when my feyther carried her awa. He was a gentleman of Liddesdale. And I hold after 'em baith."

A moss-trooper and some stolen farmer's daughter, then, were Rinyon's forbears — a droll parentage that prepared Christopher for any surprises. Yet the next development tickled him even more. It was the sixth evening of his sojourn at the hemmel, and, left alone half the day, he was sick for company and out-

of-sorts by the time Crozier sauntered in. "'Sdeath! I would I had a book at hand, if I'm to lie here alone all the day through," he grumbled.

"How wad ye say an ye had na a buik intil your hand for a twalmonth?" Crozier asked, with a wistfulness that made Christopher jump to a conclusion: "You've been a scholar, Rinyon?"

"Edinburgh," the other answered curtly. "Then I was dominie a time in a grammar school —"

Christopher strangled a laugh. "I'd give all the money I haven't to 'a' seen you! 'Must 'a' been a proper pedagogue."

"Na," Crozier replied soberly. "I wadna beat the bairnies sae often as was needful. I made a mash of it all. I've made a mash of all I've e'er laid hand til." He shut his mouth at that, and spoke no further word of himself.

But the surprise with which Christopher learned the occupation that had held Rinyon before he trailed a pike, was nothing to the bewilderment which he felt when he woke at last to the fact that Crozier, as if he had been an equal, was disapproving of his conduct. Christopher himself had suffered never a qualm at the cool fashion in which he had withdrawn himself from his uncle's house; they had bidden him go, and he had gone, and he did but laugh when Killion told him how Calderwood had out men to look for him. "I am helping to hunt, and he hath paid me a shilling," chuckled Dearmont.

Twice Christopher heard near at hand the halloos of searching parties and the firing of guns, but the hemmel was so cunningly hidden in the depth of a close cedar thicket that no white man, not in the secret of the path, strayed thither. Once, indeed, an Indian searcher found his way in, but luck had it that he was a good friend to Hayne, who that day was with Christopher. "A' is called Zimri Trescott," the hunter made the newcomer known to his companion. "Parson converted him six year ago, but he did backslide. A' is a big sagamore, and has a city just to northward beyond the Great Swamp."

"Sagamore, me," the savage grunted. He was a tall, wiry fellow, whose sinews stood out beneath his naked flesh; he had the stern profile and, at the first seeming, thought Christopher, the taciturn dignity of a Roman worthy. But very speedily the Roman worthy had squatted down on his hams in the dirt to gulp the draught of spirits which Hayne proffered, and, warmed by the liquor, fell to jabbering to his host what proved, when the Englishman translated it, amusing ribaldry. Palpably, no stern sense of honor to make him keep faith with Calderwood was in him. Hayne gave him another draught of spirits, and Christopher gave him a half-dozen bullets, spite of Hayne's dutiful warning that it was a finable offence to furnish munitions to the savages, and the Sagamore Zimri stalked away with an assurance that he would not reveal the white man's lurking-place.

He kept his word; all the men at the hemmel kept their word in that particular, perhaps less for love of him, Christopher realized, than for joy to vex Master Calderwood. So the search for the lost man continued here and there through the woods, and on the eighth evening Crozier, with his face of quiet disapproval, brought word that Calderwood was offering a reward, twenty shillings to the man who could give him any tidings of his nephew's whereabouts. "Too low!" sneered Christopher. "When he wants me five pound worth, I'll think on going home."

"Twenty shillings is a fair bit of money," hinted Killion, who, with Trull, lay smoking with Christopher before the door of the hut. "And pest on't! there's never another drop of strong waters in the hemmel."

Crozier, gazing down at Christopher, gave no heed to the last speaker. "Ye've pushed the jest far enow. The town is all astir, and Dame Calderwood is main fashed. Ye should take shame til yoursel."

Christopher's blue-gray eyes were wide with frank amazement; he was not wont to bear rebuke from any man, least of

all from a bond-servant. He gave a hateful little laugh, and was hesitating among five disagreeable speeches which he had to aim at Crozier, when Trull flung back an answer: "Stop your prating, Rinyon; 'twill scarce hurt Bess Calderwood to waste a little of her fat flesh with fretting."

Christopher swung round upon him. "Leave my kinswoman's name out of your talk, sirrah!" he turned the wrath he was cherishing for Crozier all upon Trull.

It shamed him, having said it, that he shot a glance at Crozier to see if he approved, and, conscious of it, he was rather curter than usual to the Scotchman, and though it was no more than early twilight, limped off sulkily to his pine bed. After all, Crozier was right, and he must go home to-morrow, he decided, but he would do it dramatically; he thought his leg was sound enough for him to hobble with Crozier's help — Devil and all! why Crozier more than another? Well, he would reach home about midnight, wounded and spent; he wondered if curiosity would get the upper hand of dislike in Nan Calderwood so that she would come forth from her chamber to witness his return.

His plan, however, went all awry. About the middle of the next morning, when all the company but Pritchard, as it chanced, were roasting fish at the fire-hole before the hut, Christopher, who was lying in the hemmel to husband his strength against evening, heard without a rustle of branches, as of one approaching, and instantly perceived the voices of his companions were hushed. A louder rustling at the outer wall of bushes, — Pritchard would never come so swiftly and noisily, — a new step in the enclosure, and then a blustering voice: "Well, and have I unearthed you at last? So this is where you lurk, is it, and defy the Constable and all honest men? You'll find a stop set to that now. I'm thinking the Court will suit you with a master, Dearmont, and you, too, Webb Hayne. And you, Crozier, have you Master Trescott's permission to idle your time here in the woods?"

The others had swallowed this speech with the submissiveness of men cowed by the law that always warred against them, but Crozier spoke up stoutly, "If I hae or hae not, 'tis na your concern; 'tis your feyther, not you, is constable, Captain Enoch."

At the name of his old aversion Christopher started up, and, limping hurriedly, stepped into the opening of the hemmel. Outside, his hosts, just as they had been taken, knelt or sprawled about their little fire, and over them, fowling-piece on shoulder, stood Master Enoch Gleason. At the sound of a footstep he glanced up, and over the heads of the four ne'er-do-wells the two young men eyed each other. Then drawled Christopher, leaning easily in the doorway of the hemmel with one arm akimbo, "Rinyon, who is this cully? Did you bid him come hither?"

"So you're one of this sweet crew, my fine tavern-swaggerer?" asked Gleason.

"For if you did not bid him," Christopher went on, "sink me if I sent for such a scurvy patch! Carry yourself elsewhere, good master. Here on my uncle's land I entertain none but my friends, so jog about your business quietly and civilly, else I'll send a brace of these gentlemen to bang you off for a trespasser."

At this encouragement the four got to their feet, more or less alertly, and Gleason had the prudence to draw back to the narrow entrance of the yard. "It's Calderwood himself shall cope with you," he said, trying to swallow the mortification that struggled through his tone. "I let your name protect you and your precious friends for now, Ferringham, but you can be sure, my lad, the Magistrate will not suffer his woodland be made a thieves' ordinary and —"

"Ah, sneek up!" replied Christopher, whereat his comrades, Killion the loudest, burst into laughter, in the midst of which Gleason turned and flung crackling out of the enclosure.

"The fat's in the fire now," muttered Trull, instantly sober. "He'll tell all he hath seen."

Christopher whistled between his teeth. "I shall have to go tamely home, else they'll come fetch me. You, Rinyon, you should run well on those long legs, post away ahead of Captain Enoch to my uncle's house and give him to know his dear nephew is found. And, Rinyon, get him to tell those twenty shillings into your hand. When money is to be had thus for the asking, hang me if honest men should go thirsty!"

CHAPTER V

THE PROUD PEAT

CALDERWOOD himself could hardly tell whether he were more relieved to hear from the Scotchman of Christopher's safety, or angered to learn from Enoch Gleason, a quarter of an hour later, the trick the young scapegrace had put upon him. All the last days he had been tormented, not only by the fear that his kinsman lay crippled and starving in some nook of the forest or had been carried away by prowling savages, but by the thought that he had let Christopher go to possible destruction in anger and, he must admit, in unjust anger. He still recalled the young fellow's stricken look at his biting speech that day in the fields, and he remembered, too, that William had held in his hand Christopher's last sixpence and had faltered to his father's questions, "He gave't me—if I wouldn't cry, and he said—he must school his tongue."

At that moment Calderwood had had an impulse to send the child to fetch the young man back, but there the stiff pride of the Magistrate cried out. He could not humble himself before a fellow of Christopher's stamp so far as to say, "I was overhasty; forgive me;" but he resolved to receive his nephew somewhat graciously when he came back and henceforth bear with his superficial vices more patiently.

But Christopher did not come at his asking, and when he did come, it was not in the guise befitting a penitent. He had deliberately hidden himself,—Enoch Gleason's account left no doubt,—and, while his uncle's household, the whole vil-

lage, in fact, were in commotion for him, was making merry at their anxiety. Calderwood's anger smouldered at the thought, but, set to make no second mistake with his kinsman, he controlled himself, and, paying Crozier the twenty shillings, spite of Enoch Gleason's thrifty dissuasions, bade his head-servant, Bray Williams, go with a horse and fetch the prodigal home. Against that return his instructions to the family were explicit: no warmer welcome should be given to Christopher than to a runaway turnspit cur.

So when, just before the evening meal, slow horse-hoofs were heard in the yard without, no one of all the family who were gathered in the kitchen offered to go forth, though Elizabeth made but a poor pretence of being busied, and Jack looked wistfully toward the open door. Calderwood, who had stepped to the window to get a better light upon the Bible in which he was seeking the Scriptures to read at supper, saw with a stir of satisfaction that he had stripped his scapegrace nephew of all honor in the household, and there, in the midst of his satisfaction, Christopher himself stood on the threshold. Beneath his disordered hair his face was piteously white and shadowed below the cheek bones; his shirt was grimy, and his clothes disarrayed as if he had slept in them; one stocking, slit away, showed a swathing of bloody bandages, and, to ease the hurt leg, he stood with his shoulder pressed against the door-frame. "Since you summoned me, sir, I am come. What is your pleasure?" he began, in a low voice that had no trace of his old effrontery, and then he thrust forth one hand and gripped the side of the door. "May I sit down?" he blurted out, as if against his will.

No sooner had he dropped down on the form by the door, than Elizabeth, with a look of gentle defiance for her husband, was at his side and her arm was about his shoulders. "Oh, my poor lad!" she commiserated. "You have been ill and suffering, there alone in the wood—"

"Scarce alone, Bess," Calderwood interrupted dryly. "And

'twas of his own choosing. He had no need to lie in the wood ; this house stood open to him, as he doth know."

"Open to me?" Christopher pitched to his feet. "Did you not as good as thrust me out at the door? If I'm not fit to speak to your children and to you, what think you I will do? Go lie in your barn and talk with your serving-men? I took me where I found comrades who did not scorn me; I had been there still, had you not called me back —"

"Oh, prithee, Nathan, Christopher!" gasped Elizabeth, and, gazing from one to the other of the angered men, put her hand to her filling eyes and turned away to her chamber.

"If 'twere not for her I had never stepped foot in your house again!" Christopher hurled at Calderwood, and, stumbling after his aunt into the chamber, half thrust to the door.

Through the opening Calderwood saw the young man had flung himself down on his knees by Elizabeth's chair. With a shrug he turned again to his Scriptures, but he had not glanced over one page before Nan was at his side. "Oh, Nate!" she whispered, and, between anger for the culprit and grief for her brother, there were tears in her voice. "After the trouble you've been at for him! You've been anxious as 'twere one of our lads, and now! Send him back to Ziba Trull and the others of those wretches. He is not fit to dwell with decent folk."

"Tut, tut, Puss! I shall not give him cause to say twice that I drove him forth," Calderwood answered. It was no pettish vexation he voiced, but the resolution that had formed in the moments since Christopher stepped into the kitchen. Sir Edward Ferringham wished this rapscaillon to be harbored, Elizabeth wished it; to cast him forth now would be to the family a cause of unspoken reproach against Calderwood. Even worse, it might seem on the Magistrate's part an admission that he did not hold himself strong enough to guard his sons from their kinsman's contamination. Christopher should not put him in the wrong a second time, Calderwood

resolved; he should stay unchecked there at Lastbrook till, after he had broken every bond of decency, Sir Edward should send the word, and Elizabeth herself, surfeited at last, should ask for her children's sake that he be cast out. "Give him but rope, he'll hang himself without aid of mine," Calderwood thought, and, dismissing so slight a subject, went to supper.

Elizabeth took her seat at table with a bearing of Christian charity that prepared him for the words that followed: "Poor Christopher hath gone to his chamber. He is sorely hurt and weary, so I bade him go to his bed and I would fetch him his supper. And I must say, Nathan, I think you dealt somewhat harshly by the poor lad. He uttered no murmur of complaint against you, though, only begged me to forgive him for that he had frightened me." The touch of triumph that she could bring this dare-devil to his knees, where her wise husband was set at defiance, was audible in her tone. "And in truth, now I have made him to see what terror he set us all in and what trouble he hath caused you, I think — he hath just his father's sweet temper — I think he would ask your pardon if you — if you —"

"If I asked his?" Calderwood smiled. "Gramercy for that!"

But he made no pretence at amusement when, as they rose from table, he spied David heading toward the stairway. "Whither are you going, child?" he asked, and when David, finching a little at the abrupt tone, lisped, "I was doin' to my cousin Cwistopher," checked him with so stern a "No" that the child's face began to work.

Nan sprang to the rescue. "Come, Davy, we'll go watch Bray feed the calves," she comforted, and by this and by that led the little fellow away to the stable.

Chance drew Calderwood thither a few moments later. In the dim light that fell from the northern window he could see Nan's slight figure, black against the duskiness, with the child holding to her skirts, but he did not see Williams, only heard from the dark cow-pen a voice, gruff with complaining: "Ay,

Mistress Nan, I'd liefer be leading an unbacked colt from Galway to London than bring that imp of Sathan another league. He was a-fleering—so, so, Cushah!—every blessed step of the way. 'Says wouldn't I be wanting to tie his feet under the horse's belly, and would I be wearing a different face if I were taking him to the Tower of a treason charge? Then he falls to singing *Fortune my Foe*, a-mocking at me, and, saving your presence, mistress, he was a-singing bawdy songs the rest o' the way, and when we come into the main-travelled road, he swears—'deed, I marvel the Lord doth not smite him for his blasphemies! There'll be a judgment wrought upon him one day, you mark my word, Mistress Nan, and when it comes, remember how old Bray Williams foretold it ye. He was a-swearing that he was going to ride down into the village and be drunk, and he vowed that I should be drunk too. I drunk that be a member of the church and a decent man! And the more I argued wi' him, the madder he laughed and cursed, till I got a grip on the bridle and made my master jog home. Ah, the sober bearing of him when he sees he must face Master Calderwood, did ye note? Meek as a green maid, and lame, Lord bless the man! a' can scarce crawl. You should 'a' seen him come swaggering down from the wood this day wi' that vagabond, Trescott's Rinyon."

"I misdoubted 'twas half feigned!" Nan turned to her brother. "Did you hear, Nate? What a paltry cheat it is!"

"Don't fret yourself thus, child," he counselled.

The indifferent course was easy to him, and he met his kinsman in the succeeding days with chill civility, but Nan could not follow his example. She raged inwardly at what she called her sister-in-law's disloyalty, though 'twas quite of a piece, for she always knew that Elizabeth did not value Nate at one quarter of his just worth; she worried poor Lucy till the girl dared show her admiration for Christopher only when her mother was by; and hourly, almost momentarily, she strove to keep the boys from the pollution of his intercourse. It was

a hard task; for not only did Christopher at all hours limp pathetically about the house, but she must soon combat his influence single-handed, for within a week of his return a sitting of the Court carried her brother away to Boston.

On the day that followed his departure, Nan suffered a notable check. In the belief that the enemy had gone to the shore for the afternoon, she ventured forth toward the forest to gather flowers, but when, in the lengthening shadows, she returned to the house, with her apron heavy with red lilies and blue flower-de-luce, she saw before her what she had most dreaded to see. On the doorstone sat Christopher Ferringham with the four Calderwood boys, all breathless with interest, pressing about him; in one hand he grasped the wretched little hawk which he had fetched from the woods, and in the other, she saw as she drew nearer, he held a needle with which he was piercing the upper and lower eyelids of the bird. It seemed to her the last touch that he should make the children witnesses to such cruelty, and involuntarily she caught David's hand and put her arm about William's shoulders to draw them away. "Come into the house, lads, and let me tell you of the great land turtle I saw but now," she coaxed. "Come, you do not want to see the poor bird hurt."

"No-o," protested David, with both feet stubbornly planted on the doorstone, and William spoke alertly, "He is not hurting the hawk, Aunt Nan. He is see-seeling her eyes, and when she is in the dark she will be tame."

"I want you to come with me," the girl almost pleaded.

Christopher looked up, with that in his blue-gray eyes that told he read her motives perfectly, though he only drawled, "I protest to you, mistress, on my honor as a soldier, I shall eat beef in preference to the flesh of these children;" and upon that, Jack, kneeling beside him with a handful of waxed threads, spoke bluntly: "You don't understand, Nan, being a woman. This is a man's concern."

She passed on into the house and left the four nephews with

Christopher. "I could forgive him, I truly could forgive him all the insults he hath put on me," she half sobbed, as the door of her chamber shut her in. "But oh! he must not teach Nate's boys to be like him!"

At the thought of her brother she dabbed her eyes dry, and resolutely fetched her sewing—a shirt for Nate, which she had begun immediately after Christopher's advent, and was wont to bring out with some ostentation when Elizabeth proved, to her thinking, peculiarly neglectful of her husband. She passed into the hall and seated herself on the threshold of the open house-door, whence she could see the green field, soft with the tempered sunshine of late afternoon, that spread away to the woods before her. Faintly across the field she heard the low of cattle that waited at the bars of the woodland pasture, and near at hand, in the honeysuckle that crept up by the door, the drowsy burr of a humblebee, and then, close by in the parlor, she heard a quick footstep that startled her. The door rattled open, went to with a little rushing bang, and she was aware that Christopher Ferringham had entered the hall. Out of the corner of her eye she saw that he bore upon his wrist the hapless hawk.

A moment, and he spoke abruptly, "I'm fearing, mistress, that you understand little of the gentle art of falconry." A certain wistfulness was in his tone, yet stronger a suggestion of a sneer that made her bend her eyes upon her work and deign no answer. She felt that he had stepped into the doorway and stood looking down at her. "You must bear in mind," he ran on, with that cool assumption of her interest that galled her, "when one sets to man—to reclaim—a wild hawk, the quickest course is to seel her eyes for a time and keep her in darkness. So I have done by this eyas, caught her upper and under lids together with a bit of thread, and in six days or so—"

He broke off, and for an instant, while she riveted her eyes to the swift seam and fought the impulse to glance up at him,

there was a silence in which the bumbling of the persistent bee sounded loud. Then said Christopher, with a hectoring laugh, "'Heart! but I believe 'twould pleasure you mightily, mistress, an I were a weakling bird like this so you might twist my crag. How you do hate me! 'Sbody! but I'm glad for't!"

"We are both easily fitted, then," she murmured coldly.

"For, after all, 'tis the next step to loving a man, to hate him heartily. Look now how it works with you. When you hear my step, you know it, and something sets your heart a-jump. Would it be otherwise if 'twere for love? Last thing at night you are thinking on me—you need not deny it—and first thing at morning. Renounce me if you'd do more were it love! Come, why not call it love instead of hate?"

She raised her eyes then and gave him such a look that it seemed to her he must flinch, but he fronted her steadily. "Nay, why hate me, mistress? Sink me if I can understand your wherefore! A woman hates a man who boasts her favors; I know to hold my tongue. A woman hates a coward; I—"

"You are a coward," she said slowly. "As hattel a coward as ever made war on a woman. You know my brother would fling you forth of his house, an I breathed to him one word of how you have bespoken me; you know that I am bound to tell him naught that will breed dissension betwixt him and his wife; you know I am helpless against you, and so—" With hands that shook a little, she folded her work. "An I bid you leave me, I know you will but curse at me and mock. So I shall quit the place and leave you a notable victory to brag on."

The little rustle of her skirts, the soft jarring to of the door, and he was indeed alone in the hall. A moment he stood silent, with eyes upon the parlor doorway where she last had stood, and strove to bite his small mustache. "So I'm a coward now, as well as a swaggerer and a ruffian and

the rest," he muttered, with a dull redness flaring into his cheeks. "'Fore Heaven! I'll have to teach that proud peat to know me."

He was still beating his brains for a project when he went to supper, and there chance cast it in his way. For a squaw from Zimri Trescott's village, who had just come to the house with fish, had brought word that a child of the Sagamore's lay ill, and Nan Calderwood had resolved to go thither next morning and look to the sufferer. "If Nate were here he would do't," she urged. "Some one must."

Elizabeth Calderwood ventured a weak protest or so: the Indian village was more than a league distant; Nan had never been thither without her brother; she was sure Nathan, if he were home, would not suffer her go; did Christopher now, who had a man's judgment, think a young gentlewoman should go tramping through the woods on such an errand?

"'Swounds! no," swore Christopher, whereat Nan's face, that had grown undecided, set itself again in a way that he interpreted: "I shall go now, even if the sky crack," though she said only, "I shall set forth to-morrow in the mid-morning. And Jack shall be my squire."

She fell to clearing the table with decisive rattlings, while Christopher sauntered out into the twilight fields. He did not limp quite so much when he drew out of sight of the house, but still his leg was stiff, and it was a long way he must walk, if he would carry out the notable plan he had devised. He was cursing softly at his semi-crippled state, when there sounded a gentle rustling amid the sumacs at the verge of the field whither he had loitered, and Webb Hayne slipped out into the open. "Heaven sent!" chuckled Christopher.

He heard scarcely a word of the newcomer's tale—how Captain Enoch was swearing he would pull down the hemmel about its inmates' ears, how they had quitted the place and removed the stepping-stones through the marshy ground and covered up their tracks, how they hoped—the reason at last

for his coming — if the Captain came to prick Nate Calderwood to the work, Kester Ferringham would speak a word for 'em. Christopher's thoughts were all on his own plans, and, with but the hastiest comfort for Hayne, he prayed him give Dearmont Killion word to meet him early next morning, two miles down the trail that ran from the Lastbrook clearing to the Indian village. Yes, Killion were the best man for the work, Christopher reflected, as he turned homeward; Crozier was steadier, perhaps, but Crozier — Christopher made a comical mouth. "I want no Puritan to have a hand here."

So it came about that early next morning, before breakfast, indeed, Jack Calderwood, Nan's faithless squire, was trudging into the pine woods with his cousin's coveted fowling-piece under his arm. Christopher, limping wofully at his heels, was loud in his sorrow that, after all, he could not go on with him as they had planned, but, too generous to rob the boy of his pleasure, bade him trudge forward and hunt as long as he pleased, till afternoon, in any case. But when the lad, after a sympathetic protest or two, had trotted happily away among the brown tree trunks, Christopher swung away toward the appointed spot on the Indian trail at a good pace for a crippled man.

Dearmont Killion had kept his hour well, for already he sat smoking beneath the white birches that fringed the path. He was in an admirably bad temper; not a groat had he to his pocket, and his tongue was fair shrivelled with thirst. Down dropped Christopher beside him and whipped out the four shillings which Crozier had given him as his share of Calderwood's reward. "Look you, Dearmont," — he chinked them together — "these shall be yours and you can be drunk as soon as Heaven wills, if ye'll do a piece of work for me." The yellow-brown head and the black bullet-head drew nearer together. "There's a cedar swamp, young Calderwood tells me, lies 'twixt here and Sagamore Zimri's wigwam; you're to be at the farther verge in some snug, black corner 'twixt now

and sunset. One minute or other Mistress Nan Calderwood will pass that way, returning home, and you shall spring forth—”

“With hearty good will!” Killion answered, with a sudden gleam in his eyes.

“You’re only to fright her, remember, you belswagger! And I shall come up and swinge you mightily.”

“Eh?”

“Ay, master. And she shall approve my courage, since you’re known for a desperate villain, eh? and thank me handsomely, and walk away with her hand in mine, the little rascal!”

“I take you, yes,” said Killion. “But bear you in mind, Kester, you’re to beat me softly. And tell me down the four shillings now.”

There was a little wrangling on that score, which ended in the paying of two shillings by way of earnest; then Killion slouched away from the open sunshine of the trail, and Christopher was left alone. It was drawing now toward noon, and the gray moss, when he cast himself back upon it, felt warm to his hands. Right within reach checkerberry leaves thrust through the moss, and, idly grubbing them up, he chewed them, while through the shifting birch leaves above his head he watched the rifts of blue sky.

Thus Nan Calderwood came upon him. She had quitted the house, late and alone, with a vexation that mounted at each step through the glaring fields; but when she entered the woods, the fragrant darkness of the pines and the stillness of the forest that yet was musical with little, living noises, soothed her. She walked more slowly, with the hood cast back from her warm forehead, and even once loitered at a turning of the path, where through a vista of trees she saw the distant range of hills, that on a sudden were shadowed as a film of cloud swept across the sun. “‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,’” she half murmured the Psalm she loved best; and

then, with a startling crash of the bushes, Christopher Ferringham rose before her.

"What! Alone, mistress?" he queried, with concern that she felt as mockery. "Where's Jack?"

"You know best," she answered, and, repeating to herself, spite of a flutter in her heart's depths, that she did not fear the man, stepped by him.

"Body a' truth! I don't know," he protested, trudging after her. "But since he came not and I be here, may I not serve your turn? 'Struth! you need one with a stout arm to guard you through these woods."

By this they had come down the birch-covered slope to the long glade where darkened the cedar swamp. In the first black shadows she turned and fronted him. "Leave me," she bade in a low voice. "Go home."

He shook his head. "'Is thy servant a dog?' 'Swounds! mistress, I've no intent to force you."

As she turned from him, she realized her hand was clenched about the handle of the basket she carried so that the harsh osiers cut into the flesh. At her feet she took note of the soggy black mire that in the gaps between the stepping-stones and moss-covered logs of the path oozed about her shoes. The fronds of the close-ranked cedars pressed against her face and startled her like a human touch. Yet beneath the knowledge of little sights and sounds she was aware with her whole consciousness that he was strolling behind her, and she saw, clearly as with her bodily eyes, the hateful mockery in his face.

The sunlight of the beech wood at the far side of the swamp brought a sense of rescue, but still she hurried forward. The branches on either side of the narrow trail snapped sharply behind her. "That went near to putting out my eyes," she heard Christopher murmur once, and then she was able to forget him, as she burst out from the last trees of the forest upon the Sagamore's clearing.

Yonder the fresh woods took up their march again, but here at her feet stretched the ill-kept cornfield, and beyond, in the un pitying glare of the open, huddled three or four squalid wigwams, whence came the wailing of women. The little one might have died while she stood to reason with her persecutor, was her one thought. Near running, she sped through the parched cornfield, through the brown herbage that rustled about her skirts, and, thrusting by the mat that hung at the opening, entered the Sagamore's wigwam.

An instant her eyes were dazzled by the sudden change from the sunlit clearing to the dusk of the hovel; then out of the dimness started into sharp relief here a naked shoulder, there an unkempt head of the Indians who crowded the narrow space. But she was no more than aware of their presence, for in their midst, on a meagre mat of sedge, she spied the lean form of the sick child. About him, rubbing his arms and thighs, knelt three women, and, knowing one for the mother, she addressed her: How long had the child been ailing? Let her look to him. She came on Master Calderwood's part to the Sagamore's son, and she had fetched conserves might comfort him.

Passively the squaws made way, and she knelt by the child. More clearly now, as she grew wonted to the dimness, she made out the talon-like hands, the befouled, lean body, the skull-like face, when sight and almost humanity were wasted. As she put out her hand to the vampire-like little creature, the thought of baby David, ill in his trundle-bed, whom she nursed gladly, came to her, and at the contrast repulsion swept over her so strong that she stayed her hand. Next instant, with a penitent prayer for her hard-heartedness, she raised the child gently in her arms, yet even as she did so turned her eyes from him.

Then, for the first time, she noted Christopher Ferringham, who, hands on knees, bent over her. "Will it live? Can I do naught?" he questioned; his back was to the opening so

she could not see his features clearly, but his voice had changed its mockery for the earnestness with which he had spoken to her of his life.

"I think — it seemeth starved," she answered.

"He no eat one day, two day," wailed the squaw. "He no can see me."

"Then feed him, shan't we?" Christopher clapped Nan's basket down beside her. "And I'd best pack forth some of these folk, I take it."

In the moments while she tried to force between the child's teeth a little of the confection she had brought, Nan was conscious of Christopher's goings and comings. She saw him haul a squaw to her feet with a "Nippe, nenmia," and she wondered at the promptness with which he had begun to pick up Indian words; she saw him, between coaxing and what went near to bullying, clear the lodge of half its shrill occupants; and she felt with relief the freshness of the air, as he fastened back the mat that hung at the door. Then he came again to her side with the birchen vessel of water which the squaw had fetched. "Will he not swallow?" he asked, still in that earnest voice she liked.

Nan shook her head hopelessly.

"Let me try my hand. And you, mistress, best go forth. This foul hole is no fit place for you. You're white i' the lips a'ready."

Lifting her easily to her feet, he dropped into her old place by the child, but the next moment Nan was kneeling beside him. "Here is the conserve I was to give him," she said steadily, as she proffered the jar. "Prithee, — I shall stay."

He made no further protest, all intent now on ministering to the child. On the point of his knife he patiently forced a little of the confection between its set teeth; then, with a grimace, set to washing its mouth with his handkerchief and scraping its furred tongue. Even amid the sickening squalor of the scene, Nan could not but note how tender he was of

the poor brat, for all he was cursing semi-audibly at the noisome office. He had a thought, too, for her; twice he looked up to see how she fared, and the first time comforted, "I've hope he may live yet to tomahawk us all, the little devil!"

But when he had done with cleansing the child's mouth, and had given it a few drops of the confection which he had bidden Nan dissolve in water, she saw his face was dubious. "Oh, will it not live?" she begged.

He shook his head. "Hang me if I know! We were late in coming. I would I knew somewhat of physie."

Then a space they knelt in silence, side by side by the unconscious child. The mat at the door rustled, as one by one the savages crowded in again; the fetid air grew closer; the shrill babblement rose louder each moment. But Christopher watched the scarce perceptible movement of the child's emaciated breast, so intent that he seemed not to note even when Nan, in the sick need of comfort, let her hand rest on his arm. "Damme but I'll risk another potion of that conserve!" he muttered at last. "Reach me it hither." His hand was outstretched, when a tremor sped through the body of the sick boy: a quivering in the finger-tips, a writhing of the lips where showed a fleck of foam, and again the child lay motionless.

Nan clutched Christopher's sleeve. "'Tis not — dead?"

"There, there! Don't weep. 'Tis better off, poor imp!" he urged, but she felt the slow tears starting to her eyes. The poor little lost heathen soul! and she had been pulling flowers yesterday when she might have been of service. With a heart-aching sob she hid her face in her hands, so wretched, so hungry for sympathy, that she had no thought of resenting it when she felt Christopher's arm about her.

The clamor and outcry of the savages in the wigwam, she felt with relief, were behind her; the fresh air beat upon her heated face. Christopher had brought her out into the open, and Christopher, swearing and coaxing in his earnest voice,

was trying to quiet her. "I'm — well enough," she sobbed, with an irritation she repented of, and turned her back upon him. All through the clearing, she saw as she uncovered her face, fell the mellow evening light, and the western sky was golden. She saw it streaked through her tears, then blinked and brushed them steadfastly away. "We can be of no service now," she quavered. "Come, Christopher, let us go home."

The forest was darkening when they passed out from the clearing, and moment by moment as they went the shadows thickened. They walked in silence, but Nan was aware that Christopher warded off the branches from her face, and once, at a steep ridge, helped her with his strong grasp on her arm. Slowly she found herself thinking of him, not of the piteous sight she had just witnessed, and then it was, as they descended the slope to the cedar swamp, that she perceived he was limping, and with a pang at her heartlessness, remembered his green wound. Nothing would serve then but that he should cut himself a staff, and while he stayed for that, she gladly seized on a moment alone in which to win back her self-control, and loitered on into the twilight of the swamp.

At the first turn of the path blackness shut in upon her — blackness of the blank slit of sky above, of the miry path at her feet, of the cedars on either hand, close-woven, save that here and there a lurid gleam of light, like the eye of a wild creature, shot through. All silent, too, so she listened for the indrawing of her breath, till suddenly in the dark before her something stirred. She paused, half turned to run, when a man's form, shaping itself from the darkness, sprang out before her, and an arm tense as iron gripped her waist.

Even as she shrieked in the sudden terror, she heard the sound of breakneck footsteps on the path, and Christopher's voice, with a note like fright in it: "Nan! be not afraid! Damme! I forgot, I —" She was whirled back, in among the cedars that brushed across her face and breast, while out of

the black of the trail came to her the terrifying uproar of a scuffle — the thwack of a cudgel on a man's body, Christopher's voice raging, "You drunken fool! you whoreson knave! Fire and brimstone on you!" and another voice that cursed, "Damn your soul, Kester! Hit gently!" till it sank to a whimper of pain.

At that she stumbled out into the dark trail and caught the arm of the figure that was standing. "Let him go, Christopher," she begged in a stout voice, that, as the culprit, crawling to his feet, shambled and cursed away down the path, broke into a nervous sob.

"I'm sorry — I'm cursed sorry!" Christopher panted. "I had not thought — I *am* a foul coward. And atop of all, too, poor little wench! Prithee, forgive me."

"Forgive you? For what?" she asked, and strove to see his face in the darkness.

"For — for —" he stammered. "Why, for all. I know I've not used you as you hold a gentlewoman should be used. But — but 'tis little I've seen of decent women of your years. No doubt I am a ruffian and the rest, as you said. But I'm vengeance sorry!"

"I forgive you," she murmured, and added, with a choked effort to laugh, "My feet are wet, here in this bog. Let us go." She made no resistance when he took the hand that still rested on his arm, and so, side by side, they passed on into the black of the swamp.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE DEVIL WAS SICK

"If 'twere not for him, I know not what had come of me. He is of a good courage, and gentle, too, with that poor little child. O Nate, we thought too harshly of him — *I* thought too harshly of him — didn't we?" Nan Calderwood barely suffered her brother fling by his cloak before she challenged him thus.

"Indeed, her heart were of flint, were she not moved at last," purred Elizabeth. "There that poor lame boy, when he could scarce stand, trudged clean to the Sagamore's village only to guard her, who had never given him so much as a courteous word."

"I know, I know," Nan murmured humbly. "It opened the wound in his leg, and 'twas all fault of mine."

With a resigned shrug Calderwood gazed from one to the other; matters must have gone strangely indeed in the four days he had been absent, if now his stanchest partisan was up in arms for Christopher Ferringham. As he drew off his riding-boots in his chamber, whither he bade wife and sister follow him, he called for their joint relation, and in justice admitted there was a word yet to be said for his reprobate nephew; clearly, even when proper deduction was made from the girl's enthusiasm, Christopher's officiousness had put him in the way to do Nan a considerable service.

A little vexation that he must owe aught to so paltry a fellow made Calderwood chide the girl sharply for her rash expedition; but a juster feeling made him, later in the afternoon,

go out of his way to corner his nephew and give him due thanks. At his first words the young fellow's face flushed miserably, and the amazing idea came to him that perhaps in Christopher's composition there lurked, after all, an element of modesty.

"I would you did not thank me for aught," the young man blurted out. "'Slife! I'm wearied of hearing of it, and 'twas mere chance I was by."

"You did not recognize the ruffian who sprang upon my sister?"

"'Twas too dark to see clearly, there in the swamp." Christopher backed away embarrassedly and made an end of their talk.

This novel shamefacedness stirred Calderwood to compunction that a second time he should have misread his kinsman, but his qualms were as nothing to those which were afflicting Christopher. Young Ferringham's retroactive conscience was having its will of him; every word of commendation that he won for saving Nan from the insult which his own brain had planned, made him feel himself with keener misery that which his creed taught him most to despise — a hypocrite. The uselessness of it, too! All he had plotted for was to make that contemptuous girl look on him with favor. Quite accidentally that had come to pass at the Indian village. The swamp episode was worse than superfluous.

Mingled with the honorable contempt for the whole unworthy device, a practical fear harassed him lest Dearmont Killion bear tales. He had given his ally a thorough and unexpected drubbing, and, crippled as he had been by the opening of the old wound, he had no means of getting at the man to make his peace. Killion might reveal the whole plot to Calderwood, who would believe such a story readily, spite of all the culprit's poor efforts to face it down, and would make Nan believe. With rueful clearness Christopher saw how his castle of contentment would topple about his ears.

For he had been very happy those last three days. The ordered life of a settled household, the ministrations of women, these were new in his rough-and-tumble existence, new and very pleasant. He had been lame, with no hint of shamming now, and they all, even Nan, had made much of him. Surely, it was cruel that he should be thrust back to his old footing because Dearthmont had been such a fool as to take him at his word.

While the constant dread of exposure made him flinch at the mere mention of the swamp, he was bent to snatch every moment of the pleasure that might be taken from him. He fairly haunted Nan in those days, and Nan, though she repeated to herself that she was patient with him because she was grateful, admitted to her inmost heart that she missed him in the rare moments when he was not by. It might have been the result of Calderwood's scathing rebuke, or it might have come from the pained gathering of her eyebrows at each oath, but certainly he swore less now in the presence of the women, though his tongue, long trained in such practice, was hard to control. In such new habit of civility, she suffered him watch her make butter at the kitchen table, and to sit by her on the doorstep, while she sewed and he told stories to William and little David,—she no longer frowned when he talked with the children. Then, as his leg mended, and, rather shamed of his crippled state, he hobbled out-of-doors with a stick, she showed him her pets of the stable-folk, the perky cock that strutted and was a great coward, and the motherless calf that she herself had raised, and she showed him her garden.

It lay in a shallow hollow northward from the house, a little plot of ground which she and Jack and young Nathan, in the stress of planting time when the help of the men had failed, had themselves spaded and enriched with fish that they had tugged up from the shore. She told him about it gleefully, with the joy of having made one waste spot to bloom lighting

her eyes, and Christopher swallowed an oath. The brute that Calderwood was to let such churl's labor weary her slender shoulders! A fair enough spot it was now, fragrant with old-world herbs — spearmint and catmint, sage, thyme, and tansy — and gay with bright gilliflowers and hollyhocks and a treasured cutting or two of English roses. The bees hummed resentfully when one disturbed the flowers in which they basked, and there dwelt, too, in the garden a favorite toad, a clod of dirt with diamond eyes, who hopped forth into the sun at the scrape of Nan's trowel.

Though he was in no case for long walks, Christopher could handle a trowel or make pretence at it, so he was at the garden whenever Nan had work to do. The heat of early July now was on the land, and the earth threw off a clean, warm smell of the soil. A laborer grew hot very speedily, and tired, so that often Christopher stumbled out of his allotted corner to sit on the turf at the edge of the garden where Nan weeded, and Nan herself, at such times, worked more slowly and even stopped for rest.

At such moments, while they sat together in the clear blue heat—blue sky above and blue sea to eastward where the hollow opened out—she talked a little of herself, with simple references to the humdrum life she had led for fourteen of her twenty years, in the Bay Colony, some fleeting remembrance of another life, there in England, before her father's stiff opposition to the Ship Money impoverished all his family, tales of her older brothers and sisters — some that had gone into the New Haven Colony, some that still dwelt in England, and one, a dimly remembered elder brother, who had fallen in the Puritan Earl of Essex's western campaign. Puritanism was bred in every fibre of her, thought Christopher, and then, watching the come and go of light in her brown eyes, forgave her all her crazed notions of Church and State. He found it less easy to swallow her constant praise of Calderwood, the brother Nate who had taken her, an orphan, into his family

and been to her brother and father; but it was natural, perhaps, that the girl should love that set-faced Puritan, so, for her sake, he was formally civil to his unwilling host.

He was more surprised at another quality he discovered soon in Nan. It chanced, the third morning after Calderwood's return, when Christopher had sauntered with her out to the garden, that there by bad hap they fell to disagreement. He was willing to work, but only at weeding the corner where she was established, and she wanted no help, so, set to labor there or nowhere, he went away to the side of the garden where the short grass was dryest and stretched himself out with a book which he drew from within his coat. Not a half-hour later she came to him; she did it by cautious shifting of her place of work, always with fine assumption that she followed the natural course of her labor, and he, stealing a glance now and again over the top of the page, watched gleefully till she settled beside him.

"The day is hot." She brushed her hand across her forehead with careful unconcern, and then, as he tossed his useless book face down on the grass, she gave a little cry and caught it up. "Don't hurt it! Oh, it is a Livy!" She had opened the volume with tender fingers; her eyes devoured the page before her, and her lips half formed the words.

"A scholar, mistress?" he jested.

"Be quiet!" She shook her head. "I am going to read."

He chuckled and dropped his head between his folded arms; he had no disrelish to her snubbings when he knew that good temper lay behind them. He offered no word to interrupt her studies, but he lifted his face and watched her, and delightedly traced in her too honest expressions the slow, uneasy growth of a consciousness that he was there beside her, silenced and ill-treated. There she closed the book, though she still held it, and fronted him resignedly. "You never told me you read Latin," he reproached.

"You never asked me. And then, too, 'tis unseemly that a

woman know aught of letters. I should not have dared tell you."

"Go to! Who saith 'tis unseemly?"

"Sister Bess. She doth ever cite me Governor Hopkins's wife, of Hartford on Connecticut, who read and wrote books till her brain went crazed."

Thereat they both laughed, and, sharing the joke together, grew more friendly. "Yes, it was Nate taught me Latin," she answered Christopher's questions. "Jack and I, we used to read together. But now Jack will be put to school in Boston, and I—"

"Won't you let me teach you?" he proffered.

"You said—your schooling did consist in swearing in some odd tongues," she murmured, with a down look, and then even the delight of teasing him yielded to earnestness at sight of the book upon her knee. "Lucy saith you have a shelfful of books in your chamber."

"Lucy had best not prowl into my room, else the hawk will peck out her eyes. Tell her that from me."

"Be sober, prithes. I want you to show me those books, if it like you. I have read everything between two covers that Meadowcreek doth hold, save Master Trescott's tomes of theology."

He was sober at once. Should he run fetch the books—there were but few of them—that very moment? "No," she answered. "This afternoon, when dinner is done, and my gardening is over, and I have thought of them all day,—then you shall show me them."

So that afternoon he brought his meagre armful of volumes to the place where Nan had established herself, under the three pine trees that rose upon the east side of the farmhouse, so near that their branches grazed the windows. Beneath, the brown needles, baked through, crumbled to the touch; and above, the branches rose green and green against the sky; and on the right hand stretched the fields where the hay, newly

cut, was rankly sweet. It was a place of places in which to be idle, and though Nan was making pretence at mending the shirt which Christopher had worn at the hemmel, she gladly cast it by as soon as he came in sight.

"They're only few books," he cautioned yet again, and, half lying beside her, doled them out, each with its history. "This is my Horace. I used to carry in my pocket one that was my father's, but after Worcester the guards robbed me of it—to light their pipes with, I make no doubt. So my grandmother gave me this Horace, as near like the lost one as might be. I got the Livy, too, at Ferringhurst, and this book of the Iliads."

"Latin and Greek?" she murmured. "That's rare for a man with no schooling."

"But every gentleman must know his Latin," he protested. "My father taught me somewhat, and at Oxford the chaplain of our troop taught me when he was sober. Afterward Blandford would read Juvenal and Seneca with me. So I know enough of Latin to seem to know more. But Greek, that is hard for a man to get by himself."

"Yet they do not scoff at *you* when you try," Nan said, half audibly, and took up the book nearest to hand. "This is French?"

"Montaigne, yes. And that is the Decameron, done out of the Italian. Here are my English books—a lean company, for my kinsfolk would give me no money to spend in vanities; such of the chinks as I brought into the Plantation I won at the dice on the voyage hither. My grandmother gave me this Testament. Well, I kept it, for she was good to me. But my grandfather, renounce me but he gave me Bilson on *The True Difference between Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion*! and bade me read and ponder it on the voyage and see how without repentance I was infallibly damned for having borne arms against the Parliament. An he had not been an old man, curse me but I'd 'a' flung his scurvy, treasonable book at his head! As 'twas, just ere the *Merchant's Hope* hoisted

sail, I slipped ashore into the first bookstall and bartered me off the *Christian Subjection* for a handful of odd stage-plays. This is one called *Measure for Measure*; I like it myself, though 'tis an old-fashioned piece. But here is one of the great Master Fletcher's you'll surely like, *Philaster*; and then there is Dick Brome's *Northern Lass*. I was glad I chanced on it, for 'tis nigh the only play I ever saw played upon the stage. The canting Puritans closed the theatres —" He paused, a shade abashed.

"Yes," Nan took him up pitilessly, "I am a Puritan. And stage-plays — But perchance, though one might not see them played, 'twould not be harmful to — read them?" Half flusteringly she put out her hand to the coveted quarto, then stayed. "What is that other English book? It is not a play?"

Christopher clapped his hand down on a limp volume of *Merry Tales* that had seen hard service on the *Merchant's Hope*. With the shock of a revelation it burst upon him that it were an insult, not to the droll Puritanism of the girl, but to the womanhood within her, to let her look upon those salt pages. "You would not like the book," he said bluntly, and his complete recollection of the contents made his cheeks grow warm.

The instant of silence, while Nan studiously bent her eyes upon the *Philaster*, grew uncomfortable, so he was glad when, glancing across the field, he saw a horseman ambling toward the house, and could break out naturally, "On my word, here cometh company!"

Nan laid by the book, and looked forth beneath her hand. "Yes, it is Enoch," she said, with enough pleasure in her tone to make Christopher mutter heartily, "Wildfire burn him!"

"Sh-h!" Nan drew a sharp breath. "He hath done you no harm. And there is no reason why you two should not be friends. He is a brisk, pleasant-spoken young man, and we all like him. Oh, you are not forced to be friendly," she changed to her dry tone, and the old hateful look that came to his face

moved her to add, "But he is quite as worthy of your liking as Ziba Trull."

After that Christopher gathered up his poor books in stiff silence and stalked away to the house. Up in his chamber, the parlor chamber, the windows of which looked out into the pine trees, he could hear below him, when he stepped to the casement, the bluff voice of Captain Enoch, there in the place that had been his, beside Nan. Christopher swore outright and dashed the books down on his pallet. One slipped out from the rest, the *Merry Tales*, he noted, and with sudden shift of mood he put it into his pocket along with the dice that he judged contraband in that household.

By now he was a thought sorry that he had not made use of Nan's invitation to stay by her and see just how much favor she showed this fellow Gleason, but there was no going back, so, out-of-sorts with all the world and himself thereto, he tramped down the stairs into the kitchen and loitered out toward the stable. There by the bars of the cow-yard the serving-man, Peter Harwood, came up to him; he was struggling to keep back a grin, and there was a round note of impudence in his tone: "Dearmont Killion — d'ye know Dearmont Killion, master? — he's wanting to speak with you, and shortly too. Up at the far end of the pasture he's waiting, and he said, an you came not, he's be coming to you."

Christopher treated Peter to a cool scrutiny that made the grin fade from his face. "Now refuse me if I know which hath the riper impudence, he for sending such a cock-a-hoop message, or you for bringing it!" he drawled. "My faith! I will go look to him, and to such end he'll not forget it."

He turned and swung out of the house-yard, with a brave show of surprised anger which he hoped might deceive Harwood. For at heart he knew he must go at Killion's bidding, lest worse befall him, and he raged at the knowledge. He would square accounts with his old partner, be sure, and there his hand, plunged savagely into his pocket, touched the two

shillings which were all his wealth. There was no bribing a man of Killion's stamp with such a paltry sum, and to thrash him it required one who was sound in all his limbs. Christopher stumbled over a hummock in the field and came down on one knee; he had cast aside his stick, a humiliating badge of crippledom, and he found now that his leg was weaker even than he had thought. By the time he was climbing stiffly over the pasture bars he had laid aside thought of what might come after, and was wondering only whether he could hold out to the rendezvous. The short grass of the rough pasture slope was slippery, and the sun, now almost level with his eyes, blinded him so that he tramped unawares into blackberry tangles and stubborn thistles and irregularities of hummock and hollow that made him draw quick breaths.

But at last, when he was near spent, he heard before him the growl of voices, and, coming round a clump of sparse pines that crowned a ledge of rock, spied just below those who awaited him. Trull and Hayne were with Dearmont, he took note, with a sense of relief in the presence of numbers, till, as he scrambled down the sheep-path wound about the ledge, he heard Trull's voice that verged on a snarl: "Come, have you? Well, what have you to say for yourself, sirrah?"

Christopher halted unsteadily at the foot of the path and surveyed his whilom companions; they were in a bad temper, all three, and Crozier, who was stretched out on the sunny turf a few paces off, wore a blacker face even than his mates. It was a passage to be fought with diplomacy, unless he chose to run for it, Christopher realized; so, with a hardy assumption that all was well between them, he drew out his pipe. "Got a flint, any one?" he asked indifferently, and set himself down in the lee of the ledge that towered above them; his leg was aching rarely and he pressed one hand to the old wound.

"Y' need not think to carry it away here with your cursed gentlemanly air," swore Killion; he turned back his shirt-

sleeves, and on one bared forearm Christopher saw the long discoloration of a cudgel bruise. "You gave me that, you, Kester Ferringham. I could 'a' broke your back, had I done more than guard my head. But I kept my word. You broke faith wi' me. D'ye think you be such a gentleman you can lam men as you list? 'Swounds! I'll teach you another note. Here one man is good as another. I owe you one beating and 'sdeath! I'll give it you here and now."

He paused, for sheer lack of breath, and Christopher, carefully intent on cleaning his pipe stem, threw in, "You'll note, Dearmont, I happened to change my plan after I spoke with you."

"And you swore to pay him for't," Trull yelped.

"Is that it?" Christopher drawled. "Why, there's your two shillings. Faith! you've sweat enough the last ten minutes to earn 'em doubly."

Killion strode to him and with a fine gesture struck the coins from his hand, though his eyes followed where they fell. "You won't buy yourself off!"

"On my conscience, if you go this gait much longer I shall begin to be angry!" Christopher answered steadily, though his fingers crisped about the stem of his pipe. He was down on the ground, quite helpless, even if his leg were in good case, and Killion towered over him appallingly tall and aggressive. He shot a swift glance at the others; Trull and Hayne were watching with eager interest for what should follow, and Crozier, who was snapping twigs between his fingers as he lay, looked black as a thundercloud.

"'Twill do you small good to be angry." Killion lingered to enjoy the situation to the full. "I have you where I would have you, and —" It may have been accident that, as he stood close over Christopher, his heavily shod foot struck against the injured leg.

Atop of the shame that he must take a beating from such a knave as Killion came actual hurt that wrung from Christopher

an oath that sounded almost a cry of pain. He made a hopeless effort to start to his feet, went down again with head tingling under a cuff from Dearmont, and, as he blinked for sight amid the dancing spots before his eyes, heard the smack of another resounding blow, and a howl from Dearmont, and a yell of protest from Ziba and Webb.

Christopher sat up, still rubbing his head, and groped with his other hand for the pipe he had let fall. Killion, with his nose bleeding, was just picking himself up, and back to Christopher, but right above him, stood Crozier. "Play fair, you false Scot!" spluttered Killion. "Didn't you say you'd hold your hand? didn't you say, quick as any, he ought to be thrashed?"

"I'm na saying he doesna merit a skelping, if you've told us a true tale of him and Mistress Calderwood," Crozier spoke judicially. "But you're na to give it him."

Brisk counter-wrangling in four voices followed, till Christopher, clear-headed again, brought himself to his feet. "Hold your tongues, the pack of you!" he raised his voice. "You're three cursed cowards, and I'll fit you for it with your bellyful of fighting. Just so soon as I've two sound legs to stand on I'll quit you, Dearmont Killion, and I'll have something with a swinge to it left for you, Ziba, and for Webb too. And if I find one of you hath spread the tale abroad and bandied the gentlewoman's name about, I'll — kill him!"

Dearmont snarled a last word about talking big over another man's shoulder, and limped away to cleanse his streaming face; Trull and Hayne went at his heels, and Crozier made a movement to follow them. "Stay, Rinyon," Christopher dropped back to his old jaunty tone. "I want to thank you for banging that knave."

Crozier stood stiffly and, looking into Christopher's eyes, took no note of the hand he had held out. "I'm thinking the blacker knave-o' the twa was the ane that lay along the ground."

The last shred of patience that Christopher had clung to

through the successive humiliations of the day slipped from him. "On my soul, this grows better and better!" he drawled. "First Killion threatens to beat me, and now you, Trescott's Rinyon, approve him. Where did ye learn all your sound doctrine, man? In the Parson's cow-house? When I'm craving instruction in what befits a gentleman, I'll go for it to a gentleman, not to —"

He was talking to Crozier's back, he found; the man that had friended him had turned and was trudging deliberately toward the woods. An instant Christopher stood silent, while to his ear came clearly the tinkle of the sheep-bells on the neighboring pasture slope. Then the cry broke from him: "Crozier! come back!" What was it he had said? And he had quarrelled with Nan, and this man who was leaving him without a word was the only friend he had in Massachusetts.

Crozier still paced forward stolidly, and at that Christopher, put to his last shift, whimpered, "Rinyon! My leg!" and dropped down again on the ground.

He had read his man accurately. Time enough had not passed for him to grow anxious before Crozier, still with indifferent face, was at his side. "Can ye stand?" he asked dryly.

Christopher could stand, and, once on his feet, caught Crozier's arm; he guessed well that the other, however angry, would not thrust him aside for fear of making him fall. "I'm sorry, Rinyon," he pleaded. "I meant not what I spoke. I know you're a gentleman, and in the right through all this, and I would to Heaven I'd never had a hand therein! Stop frowning on me. I say I'm sorry, and I've said that to few men in my life."

"The more shame til you, then, if ye were in the wrong, Master Ferringham," Crozier said grimly, but at least he had unbent his lips and begun to talk, so there was hope for Christopher.

But the fright lest he lose that one friend, and the less selfish pang, too, at the hurt still visible in Crozier's face, made

him very docile all the painful way that Crozier helped him home. From the height of his ten years' seniority Crozier lectured him paternally, and Christopher took it all meekly, since Rinyon had ceased "mastering" him and had begun again to call him Christie. "I shan't do the like again by any woman," he promised. "And 'slife! I'll beat Dearmont so he can neither stand nor go!"

Yet this laudable purpose which he carried with him back to Lastbrook could not quite blot out his sense of guilt toward Nan; he would thrash Killion the harder for her sake, he vowed, and meantime he was very quiet and careful in his bearing toward her and all her household. Nan repented of her sharp speech to him, and Calderwood even, finding him one day bent over the same Horace with Jack, looked on him with a shade more friendliness. To Christopher's surprise, he would not lend him his saddle-horse, but he suffered him use the canoes at will. Christopher fostered his muscles with much paddling, and, the next step, inveigled Joel Trask, the youngest of the serving-men, into going to buffets with him. "Play, quotha?" whimpered Joel, knocked down for the third time. "I's want none of your earnest, then."

By the next week Christopher had sauntered into Meadow-creek, with his rapier slapping across his thigh, a gazing-stock for the townsfolk, in whose mouths his name was become already a by-word, and sought him out the alehouse. Good-wife Naylor made much of him, somewhat for recollection of old kindness, more, perhaps, for the sake of his comely face, and he began upon her buttery hatch his long score. That day, too, he saw Dearmont Killion in the street and made a rendezvous with him for Thursday.

That, as it chanced, was the day of the fortnightly lecture, and Calderwood, who held a man who could walk to the alehouse could walk to church, bade Christopher come with the household to meeting. He trudged down the sunny road decorously at Nan's side, and he sat through the hour among

the young men and lads at the back of the house, quiet as if his mind were on Master Trescott's words. But he was watching Dearmont Killion and choosing the spots on face and breast where a blow would fall heaviest, and, as soon as the lecture was ended, he was away into the thick woods with the five comrades of the hemmel.

Now as to what befell in the woods, the spectators, always with the terror of fines upon them, told nothing for months; it was a full year later that Homeric scraps drifted through Meadowcreek — how Christopher and Dearmont had stripped their clean young bodies to the waist and leaped upon each other; how glorious blows had fallen, and Christopher, with his white chest bruised and his yellow-brown hair atoss like a colt's mane, had grappled with his adversary, and heaved him up, and hurled him on his head. Only so much Meadowcreek knew at the time: Christopher, toward four of the clock, walked whistling through town, with his hat acock in the faces of all men, and an hour later Trescott's Rinyon and Webb Hayne helped Dearmont Killion to his cabin. He had fallen from a tree and his collar bone was broke, Crozier answered, honest-eyed, to all questions.

Such facts and the embroidery rumor put thereto drifted to Lastbrook, the most of it by the help of Captain Gleason, who rode thither in haste. Calderwood was able to read between the lines, and it was a grim face of disapproval he had for Christopher, when the young gentleman sauntered in just at the close of supper. To be sure, he knew about Killion, he made innocent answer to his uncle's questions; a pity he had had such a fall!

"And you, too, did you fall from a tree?" the Magistrate asked dryly.

"That bruise on my forehead?" Christopher put by his disorderly forelock. "Nay, I was running to pick Dearmont up, and I did stumble over a stump." He got his supper in his hand and went, singing beneath his breath, up the stairs.

But there were sober faces in the kitchen at the disgrace of this suspected offence, and Lucy, shaken for once in her loyalty, slipped away to her chamber, where Nan, bending over Christopher's Livy upon the window-ledge, was reading in the last twilight. To her Lucy poured out her protests: 'twas unworthy of a gentleman to fight with a cast servant; why would Christopher consort with such ruffians? and Nan listened with eyes on the gray fields beyond her window and thoughts far from her young niece. "I knew 'twas Killion set upon me in the swamp," she told herself. "And Christopher knew, though he was too generous to betray him. But mayhap he did punish him this second time — because of me. Pshaw! 'tis silly to think so, and, to be sure, I don't believe it," she spoke aloud.

"Believe what, Nan? I said his conduct was shameful."

"Ah, yes," Nan answered gently, as she closed the Livy. "No doubt 'twas — unseemly."

CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN CHRISTOPHER DIVERTS HIMSELF WITH MEADOWCREEK

It was in the week that followed Killion's "accident" that Christopher first cast about for respectable comrades in Meadowcreek. Keen as was the enjoyment he still took in the pursuit of Nan Calderwood, a man with sound limbs could not spend all his time at an apron string. He hungered for virile companionship, and, save for what Lastbrook afforded, the half-grown Jack and the contemptuous Calderwood, there was none at hand. In the sequel of the fight he had reacted violently from his acquaintances of the hemmel; not so much the promptness with which they had turned upon him at Killion's bidding, as the readiness with which, at Killion's downfall, they had cringed before his victorious fists, disgusted him. He vowed that he would have no more dealings with any of them, save always Rinyon Crozier, and he, for his share in whatever mishap had befallen Killion, was held rigorously to labor by his master, so Christopher found himself quite alone.

"A pestilence den this town is!" he bewailed himself presently to Calderwood. "Never a good fellow to be met with who'll crush a cup or throw a main with you. The devil come and fetch me if I see what a luckless knave like myself is to do!"

It was in the stable the talk had begun, and now Calderwood, with a hand on his nephew's shoulder, turned him toward the slit-like window to the north, through which showed the distant cornfields and beyond the pine woods. "Per-

chance if a luckless knave such as you took an axe on his shoulder and spent a few hours in riving timber yonder, or even in grubbing up the weeds in the garden, the time would go swifter."

Christopher drew back from the touch of his hand. "Upon my soul, sir! A gentleman at the ploughtail?"

"And why not?" Calderwood took him up. "You that are so tender of your gentry, bear in mind that John Winthrop who was our governor here nigh twenty years was not ashamed at need to put his hand to the plough or fell trees, even as his servants. What befitted him may befit a cadet who is dependent on the bounty of his kindred."

"And do you think, sir?" Christopher asked, cooler as Calderwood grew hot, "if my grandfather had held me a mere cadet, he would 'a' done other than left me to rot in the rebel prison there at Elnwick? If you believe otherwise of him, then damme but you read my good grandsire imperfectly! Come, come, sir, you know well as I 'tis no question here of a cadet. My cousin George is childless and I am next heir. And what figure d'ye think the man who should yet be master of Ferringhurst would cut at a hind's labor?"

"A far prettier figure than he cuts swilling wine in an alehouse or going to buffets half-naked with every lewd companion," Calderwood retorted, and, deigning no further speech, went about his own "hind's labor."

Plainly, no amusement was to be had at his kinsman's hands, so in his extremity Christopher turned to those friends of Calderwood who frequented the farm, but he speedily drew back rebuffed. Young Captain Enoch was eternally riding out to Lastbrook to confer about the purposed voyage of the *Gilliflower*, a subject which required more converse with Nan than with the Magistrate, but even for love of fellowship Christopher could not stomach the man, and he had just as little liking to the Captain's father, the ex-Roundhead Constable, who on his first night in Meadowcreek had handled him with such

scant ceremony. For Master Moses Atherton and Elder Jeanson, they treated him with as cool an indifference as if he were an unmannered schoolboy, and with Master Trescott, the minister, he fell into deep disgrace.

Trescott dined one day with Calderwood, and, as was his practice, before he quitted the house had a word with each inmate on his spiritual condition. Christopher opened his blue-gray eyes at such catechising, but the minister was an old man, so he answered him civilly: "My faith! yes, sir, I've had a godly upbringing. My guardian, Captain Carewe, was a pestilence careful man in such regard. He was always at pains to take the Sacrament before he fought a duel."

After that both Trescott and Calderwood had much to say of his hardened ignorance, so much that Christopher henceforth avoided the house when the minister came thither. But he had better luck with Trescott's son, Benjie, a blue-eyed youth, destined for the ministry, who used to saunter out to Lastbrook for his frank wooing of Lucy. It was Lucy who, with an innocent hope that so good a lad as Benjie might influence for righteousness her questionable cousin, brought the young men together, and on such introduction followed a brief, disastrous companionship. Christopher welcomed this possible comrade with open arms; he was sorry for Benjie, who lived in mortal fear of his father, and had never seen aught beyond the paltry town of Boston and the poor school they dubbed "college" yonder at Cambridge. So he dragged him up and down the woods on all-day hunting trips; he told him tales of camp and court the like of which the lad had never heard; he indulged him in a first smoke, and, crowning iniquity, he taught the minister's son to play at the dice.

It came through no offer of Christopher's. By chance one Sunday, when he pulled out his handkerchief in meeting, there succeeded two sharp little rattles on the floor, which caused a subdued movement to run along the bench of youths among whom he sat. The Tithingman turned thither, but,

ere his coming, Christopher had recovered the contents of his pocket, not so quickly, though, but his nearest neighbors spied the cubes of white bone with their black pips. "Were not those dice you let fall in meeting?" Benjie asked next day, and Christopher, hungry for sport, not only showed him dice and box, but taught him to throw. He longed to propose stakes, but Benjie was too tender a woodcock for his plucking; however, when young Trescott told him that two other youths of the town, Daniel Mawry, the miller's son, and Theophilus Atherton, knew how to play, Christopher scented fair sport and robust fellowship at last, and desired their acquaintance.

So one blazing July morning a party of four sat at the dice in the orchard by the house of Benoni Pritchard. Christopher himself chose the place; the house was his uncle's old homestead, and the orchard still belonged to Calderwood. It sloped westward to a deep brook that there widened out to join the creek, and close by the margin a gnarled apple tree and a thicket of raspberry bushes made both a shade and a screen against the neighboring house. There in the mottled shadow Atherton spread his doublet upon the turf, and about it the dicers established themselves.

It tickled Christopher to see how readily these honest young men caught the trick of the play, and caught, too, a swaggerish bearing, patterned somewhat upon Captain Enoch, somewhat—he grimaced at this compliment—upon himself. They held themselves sad dogs who knew a good bit of this wicked craft, so the ex-trooper of the King felt no call to use them tenderly. Starting with a shilling's capital, borrowed from Benjie, he doubled and trebled by a fine run of luck, till some fifteen shillings in wampum and silver were bestowed in his long-empty pockets. He could afford now to lie back, munching green apples and watching the flicker of light through the branches above him, while his companions, with tempers worn raw, began to dispute each throw.

A stake of four shillings was soon in question between Benjie and Theophilus, and Christopher, sorely against his will, had pulled himself up kneeling by the outspread doublet and was trying to render a judicial award, when right above him, as it seemed, a shrill voice clamored: "Will you but look and believe my word?" and another, breaking through it, wailed: "Brother Ezra! Look but on Benjamin!"

The blankness of dismay fell upon the gamesters, for right over them stood the awe of Meadowcreek. Master Trescott had come upon them through the wicket to Pritchard's house, and, perhaps worse, behind him fluttered three women — Dorcas Pritchard, the informer, her austerity lost in the shrill passion of the common scold, Jerinnah Trescott, the minister's spinster sister, who, since the death of his second consort, ruled his household, and little, wiry Jane Gleason, the Constable's shrewish wife.

"Dice!" Trescott's fierce voice cut through the shrillings of the women. "Benjamin, give me those devil's tools into my hands!" Benjie, his face ashen for all his nineteen years, obeyed tremulously, and with a vigorous swing of the arm Trescott sent box, dice, and all into the brook. The little jet of water as they sank shone in the sun, and the ripples, widening, were instantly lost.

"D'ye note, that was my property, sir?" Christopher suggested, as he took another bite of his apple.

"Property!" Trescott towered over him. "And the souls of these young men be God's property, that you would corrupt to a blackness even as your own. And thou, Benjamin, thou unworthy son, get home!"

As he spoke he raised the staff on which he leaned and fetched his son a blow across the shoulders which made Christopher's lips set with sudden tightness. If the Parson meant to administer such discipline to them all, he doubted if his age and office would hold him safe. But Mawry and Atherton, waiting for no such possibility, jumped to their feet and

slipped toward the wicket with unseemly haste that made Christopher lift his voice: "Hey, Theophilus! 'Sblood and 'sdeath! man, y' have forgot your doublet."

"The shameless vagabond!" cried Goodwife Pritchard.

"A wolf in sheep's clothing come among the lambs!" wailed Mistress Jerinnah, with pitying eyes on the chapfallen Benjie.

"If there be any law in the Plantation!" snapped the Constable's wife. "A vile, cheating gamester —"

"Hey, hey, goodies!" Christopher cut in. "You'd best bustle back to your brewing and baking. This is no matter for you to meddle in."

"The brazen knave!" shrilled Dorcas Pritchard. "And a-corrupting my poor husband —"

"Never fear! A' was corrupted long ere I was born," Christopher retorted, and the idea that he could contaminate that hoary-headed reprobate, Benoni, brought an irrepressible grin to his face.

"Laugh, do!" Dorcas scoffed fiercely, and thereat the chorus, drowning even the minister's voice, began again.

With a weary shrug Christopher untied his shoestrings and, rising to his feet, leisurely kicked off his shoes. The movement was unexpected enough for a sudden silence to fall upon his persecutors. "Stay long as ye will and talk as ye will, my mistresses," he drawled. "I'm going to strip and dive for my dice here in the brook." He slipped off his doublet and tossed it to the ground.

"Strip? In my presence?" gasped the Constable's wife. "You dare not, sirrah!"

"Ah, but I do," Christopher answered pleasantly. "Stark as the steeple." He unfastened his shirt with a movement which suggested that next moment that indispensable garment would go over his head.

"Monster!" cried the minister's sister, and with one accord the three turned their backs and scurried away through the orchard. The Constable's wife wore heeled shoes that made

her gait uncertain, and the minister's sister, who was stout, panted helplessly, last of all, her panniers atilt with the haste she kept. As if their motion shook the very trees, a hard apple now and then thudded down before them. At the wicket the Constable's wife, who had reared a son of her own, had the temerity to glance back; Christopher promptly stripped off his shirt, and when, casting the garment aside, he could glance about him again, he saw the Meadowcreek dames had vanished.

Only Master Trescott stood regarding him sternly. "Thou lascivious buffoon!" he began. "I have a word for thee."

"On my soul, I must seek my dice!" Christopher protested, and, flinging by his remaining garments, plunged into the brook. He had no intention of staying within striking distance of that staff which might deal him an insult he was powerless to retort on such an adversary.

For a little space the minister delivered from the bank a stinging commentary on Christopher's manners and morals, which the young man, with head under water a good part of the time, heard but disjointedly. It was like seeking a needle in a haystack, this quest of his, but he held to it doggedly, with a pleasant under-consciousness of the feel of the cool water upon his body, of the green leaves and the sunlight dazzling about him, and, when Trescott's strident voice ceased, of the ripe stillness of the noontime.

Luck had it that at last he came panting to the surface with one die clenched in his hand. "I've got it, sir," he announced, and then, as he brushed aside the dripping hair that blinded him, saw that the minister had quitted the bank, and in his place on the green slope stood the Constable Gleason.

He stood easily, his hands in his pockets, and his staff of office tucked at an angle beneath one arm. "Better come ashore, Christopher Ferringham," he bade, as he met the young man's eyes.

"Renounce me but I'm well at my ease here!" grinned

Christopher; his Roundhead acquaintance should have wet feet ere he laid hands on him.

But Gleason, quite unruffled, strolled up the bank and gathered Christopher's clothes into his arms. "Stay there, then, just as long as it likes you," he tossed over his shoulder, and so walked away.

He had fitted young Ferringham this time, he reflected with dry satisfaction, and, as he strode back to his forge, he dropped a hint to the fellow-townsmen he met as to where they were likely to find the owner of the clothes. At table, too, that noon he mentioned the situation to Enoch, and he went back to his work with a comfortable surety that Christopher would not be without company there at the brook. "Next time I bid him come, he may think on obeying," he told himself, and unconcernedly set to shoeing his mare.

It might have been two of the clock when a crony of his, Raham Mawry, the red-bearded miller, came and leaned with one hand in the doorway of the forge. "Where's your man you spoke of, Matthew?" he queried.

The Constable paused, with hammer uplifted. "Calderwood's nephew? I left him in the brook."

"You should 'a' put an anchor to him," grunted Mawry.

Gleason finished the shoeing methodically, then tramped off to take the evidence of his own eyes. The brook flowed placidly at the foot of the orchard, and the tangle of alders on the far side now made a fringe of shadow on the water, but there was never a sign of Christopher Ferringham. He was not drowned, the Constable was well assured, but whither he had taken himself was a question. If all were well with him, however, he had probably gone home for fresh garments, and if all were not well—the Constable did not stay to think of that, but, clapping saddle to the mare, cantered out to Lastbrook.

He found Calderwood at the farm, but he saw no trace of Christopher, and, loath to plunge into the subject, he waited,

and meantime spoke of planting and breeding concerns. Calderwood had two ewes and a ram new come from Ireland, and the two men, sauntering out to the sheep-pen below the stable, leaned arms on the topmost bar and stood in speech of the creatures. In the midst of their talk Jack Calderwood, panting and important, came tearing up from the cove. Gleason watched the boy into the house, and then after a time, as his eyes ranged over the field to southward, saw his lithe figure dodging down the close-mown slope to the shore.

After that it was no great surprise to him when presently, as they still talked of the sheep, Christopher Ferringham himself came sauntering up from the beach. He was wearing a tawny-colored suit,—those were gray clothes the Constable had left at his house,—and his uncovered head was very wet. "How did you come home?" Gleason hailed him.

"By water," Christopher answered. "Down the brook, down the creek, along shore. Did you think I was such a cully to stand there like a pestilence Triton while I had arms and legs?" He tossed back his dripping hair, and, striding on to the farmhouse, threw over his shoulder a last taunt: "I'll be sending a man for my clothes, Master Constable, 'less you purpose to wear 'em yourself."

Gleason, watching him into the house, noted the careful pace at which he stepped, the indescribable wincing of his shoulders, and turned to Calderwood with a smile: "There goes one will carry a sore back to bed with him to-night." Then he grew sober, and interrupted his companion's studied resumption of farming talk: "Nathan, why don't you find employment for that boy? 'Tis pity such a lusty young fellow should be idle."

"Employment? For him?" Calderwood's dark brows were elevated never so slightly. "You do not know my nephew."

In any case, Gleason knew Calderwood too well to argue with him, for all he was conscious that in his years of English service he had seen quite as much of men, and of men like

young Ferringham, as had the Magistrate, who had spent his maturity in that one narrow colony. "An he were kin to me, he'd be at work and out of mischief," he made one patient reassertion, and again plunged into discourse of the Irish sheep.

Meantime the youth of whom they spoke, safe within the kitchen from the scrutiny of the older men, sought Elizabeth Calderwood, with so rueful a face that she was touched to outspoken pity. "It's my back," he whispered her. "In Heaven's name, give me some oil, good aunt, aught that will draw out sunburn, and don't tell a word thereof to any one!"

After all, he reflected, as he dressed his smarting back in the solitude of his chamber, he doubted if he had had the best of the Constable that day; and Meadowcreek, he soon found, had no doubts in the matter. He put on a bold face and, telling the story with much emphasis on the Constable's cocksureness of his prisoner and subsequent perplexity, tried to laugh men into the belief that he had come away real victor in the encounter, but it was all in vain. Meadowcreek had a grim laugh at him, and, laughing, in the sequel of the dicing episode, drew away from him. Young Mawry and Atherton, above all, little Benjie, crossed the street out of his way; respectable Meadowcreek had washed its hands of him. Promptly Christopher swung back into the arms of his hemmel associates, and the next three days the scandalized town saw him on the wharf, in the very street, in company with Webb Hayne and Trull.

Another serious consequence that morning's gaming pulled upon him in the shape of a summons to the court on Friday. At the first he made it but a jest, and, coming jauntily into the common room of the alehouse, where the sitting was held, swept off his hat in an over-low bow to the townsmen who had gathered there. Calderwood and Atherton, as clerk, had places at a plank table, and the dicers sat on a bench in the formal custody of the Tithingman, Soper. The proceedings were brief enough — evidence from Master Trescott and Goodwife

Pritchard as to the gaming and the stake of four shillings; a scorching lecture on so profligate a vice from Calderwood that made Benjie grow red in the face and young Atherton thrum his cap and look down. But Christopher, with smiling curiosity, studied the chimney-piece above Calderwood's head, till the Magistrate rapped out the sentence: "'Whoever shall game for money shall forfeit to the common treasury treble the value of that so gamed for.' I fine you each twelve shillings."

Christopher's eyes came down to his uncle's face. "Twelve shillings, sir? 'Fore Heaven!—"

"It is time you learned, Christopher Ferringham, that profane swearing is against the law of the Commonwealth. I fine you in addition ten shillings for that oath."

"'Swounds!" Christopher let out unexpectedly, then clapped his hand over his mouth and for some minutes said nothing.

Three grim-faced fathers made agreement to pay the fines of the three less guilty gamblers. The little stir of that business died down, and Calderwood turned again to the main offender, who was left in shameful isolation on the bench: "It is thirty-two shillings you owe the treasury now."

Skittishly, as if he trod on eggs, Christopher ventured, "If it please the Court, the Court is well aware—because I so informed it last night at supper—that save for these fifteen shillings I haven't a groat in the world."

The Court, otherwise Master Nathan Calderwood, answered with appreciation that yonder in the market place was an engine called the stocks for the accommodation of those culprits who could not pay their fines.

"Not for gentlemen," Christopher suggested, so nearly beneath his breath that Calderwood was able to pass it over.

He thought fit to punish his nephew by a few minutes more of uncertainty, while he conferred with Master Atherton, who smiled dryly; then he announced: "Under the circumstances, Ferringham, since we should temper justice to those who are

young in the ways of righteousness, the Court fines you no more than fifteen shillings, but on the condition, mark you, that straightway you have that unseemly hair of yours that is a scandal to all the town cut in some decent shape."

Christopher ran his fingers through his Cavalier mop so the Ferringham cowlicks rose more aggressive than ever. "Why, if my hair prove a snare of Satan to the feet of the unwary, I'll have it cut, yes," he promised. "That is, if the Honorable Court will let me go to Boston in the Court's shallop this afternoon so I may seek me a barber."

The Court consenting, Christopher and his uncle sailed away that afternoon for the town. A smart breeze, with the smell of miles of salt waves in it, was blowing from the north-east, and the little shallop scudded recklessly before it. Calderwood was at all times a venturesome sailor; bred on the Severn banks, he had for a boat the passion that most of his fellows had for a horse, and the danger of mounting waves and veering winds gave him the exhilaration which other gentlemen drew from mad riding. That afternoon, moreover, he was bent to give the young man who boasted of his years in the Prince's fleet all the dangerous boating that he wanted, so he cracked on sail till Joel, who served as foremast man, went white. But Christopher, in highest satisfaction, begged to tend the sheets and abetted all his uncle's rashness. Fear was not in him, Calderwood admitted, and he knew how to handle a boat. By the time the shallop ran in alongside the wharf at Boston, both men were drenched to the skin with flying spray, but they were nearer than ever before to a friendly understanding. So gracious did Calderwood feel, indeed, toward his penniless nephew that he invited him to take wine with him that night at the tavern, and in the morning lent him, unasked, a shilling to pay the barber.

In the afternoon when, his business done, he prepared to hoist sail at the wharf, and no Christopher appeared, he modified his opinion of his nephew. Happily he had Joel to help

him work the shallop home; so, with the comfortable reflections that Christopher could not enter on a hopeless debauch with but a shilling to spend, and that the long tramp overland to Meadowcreek would be a lesson to him, he sailed away and left him.

Sunday morning dawned, and still no sign of Christopher, whereat Elizabeth was troubled, and Calderwood comforted her with an old proverb about bad pennies. But when the family trudged to meeting, all anxieties were set at rest, for just as the drum that beat to worship ceased to roll, Christopher himself, a bit breathless, entered the meeting-house. His hat sat somewhat loosely upon his head, and the obnoxious hair no longer showed about the nape of his neck and below his ears.

So much Calderwood, from his place on the deacons' bench below the pastor's desk, fronting the congregation, took note of; then he had given his mind to the opening words of Trecott's discourse, when a sudden rustle and titter, in which he distinguished Jack's laugh, sounded from the back of the house. Christopher had removed his hat; he now presented a head shaved close above the ears, but from nape of neck to forehead showing a plummy crest of rampant hair that resembled an Indian's feathered scalp or a fool's coxcomb. Christopher's own behavior was irreproachable; he sat rigid and attentive, his eyes earnest, his face devout, drinking in the minister's every word, but the youths about him, caught by the infection of the first snicker, were in a deplorable state.

Amariah Soper stalked thither, rapped an offender or two across the pate with his wand of office, and, enforcing the command by a tap on the shoulder, audibly bade Christopher come forth of the house.

"Wherefore?" drawled the worshipper, as if loath to be disturbed in beatific contemplation, but he rose and stepped meekly into the aisle.

"Cover your head," ordered Soper, in a rasping whisper.

"Not in God's house, sirrah, not in God's house," Christopher rebuked him in a shocked tone, and so went forth to sit through service time on the hard log step before the meeting-house, with the Tithingman mounting guard over him.

After the service he was had into the house again to confront Master Trescott and the Elder and the Deacons, who, in his own phrase, "bullied him plaguily," and threatened to make him stand the next four hours on the horse-block before the meeting-house. "On my word, sirs, I do not understand what 'tis I have done," he vowed, with so abashed a countenance that one of the Deacons—not Calderwood—took pity and explained: "Young man, your hair. You have made matter of mirth, even in the house of worship."

Christopher uncovered, and ran both hands over his offending pate, while his face from innocence changed to blank consternation. "Upon my soul!" he gasped. "I ask your pardons, gentlemen. That scurvy rogue of a barber! I'll fit him for this. I—I—" he stammered at the confession—"I was somewhat fuddled yesternoon, and I take it he put the trick upon me then."

"I fear you are lying," Calderwood spoke, with a calmness that checked the bluster that started to Christopher's tongue. But the others, who did not know him so well, hesitated at the young fellow's asseverations, and finally, after an admonition that this experience should warn him to refrain from lewd companions who put such tricks upon him, dismissed him.

In silence Christopher and his uncle marched home to dinner. Not a word did Calderwood deign to throw him, even after they entered the kitchen of the farmhouse, but addressed Williams: "Bray, so soon as you have eaten your dinner, take this fellow to the stable and cut his hair. Nay, no dinner; you can go wait for him at the stable, sirrah."

"Now wildfire on me if I suffer him touch my head!" replied Christopher. "Bray doth not like me, eh, Bray? He'd

be willing to crop my ears as well as my hair. I'll go to Boston to-morrow, sir, and make that shaver finish the job."

"Then keep your chamber till that time," Calderwood ordered, in a tone there was no gainsaying, so Christopher started up the kitchen stairs.

But scarcely were the family set at dinner, when his voice sounded plaintively through the closed door: "Uncle, may I not come to afternoon meeting?" Then pathetically: "Will you deprive me of the consolations of religion?" Still no answer was vouchsafed him, and then his kinsfolk were diverted by a cheerful whistling, as Christopher gave up the effort and departed to his room.

It was late in the afternoon when Nan climbed the hall stairs thither. She wondered a little that she should be seeking Christopher, for she told herself she was thoroughly angry at his outrageous behavior. But Elizabeth, after her husband and the older children went to afternoon meeting, had begun to fret that poor Christopher should go hungry, when no one knew when or whether he had eaten breakfast, and Nan, though she saw through her sister-in-law's open plot to win her silence by making her a confederate, had fallen in with her kind-hearted intention of feeding the culprit. So when Elizabeth had cut a generous segment of apple-tart,—"He loves sweets, just like his father," she explained, as if that were another commendable quality in her nephew,—and filled a mug with beer, Nan herself bore the provisions to the scape-grace's chamber.

At her knock Christopher appeared promptly, though he kept his hat on, and, clapping down on the top stair, fell to on the tart. "Vengeance good o' you, for I was near starved with hunger," he spoke between bites. "And by your look, too, I feared you might be thinking on being angry."

"*I am* angry," Nan said severely; as he barred the way, she could not help staying to speak with him. "To play the fool so, Christopher! Aren't you ashamed?"

"Devil a bit!" he answered, with eyes adance. "Nay, don't frown. No doubt I shall be ashamed, day after to-morrow. But it came to mind so easily and seemed so droll. I meant all well when I quitted my uncle yestermorn. But 'twas over-early to seek a barber, so I went up on the High Street toward the Common, and then I stepped into a tavern, and I met there a jolly good fellow is master of a ship. We grew friendly over our drink, and he carried me away with him to Noddle's Island, to a gossip of his, Master Samuel Maverick. A stout old heart, and a right king's man, no Puritan! He entertained me lovingly for that I served the King, and we drank, and — why, then it came to me to clip my hair in a seemly fashion, and one of his serving-lads did it as I bade. Devil and all! the Meadowcreek men might 'a' let me be. My long hair did hurt to none. And they're just as discontented now, for all my striving to please them."

"If you be in this mood, prithee let me pass downstairs." She took up the mug and the trencher, empty save for a rim of pie-crust; Christopher never ate his pastry up to the hilts.

"But I'll be ashamed, if you'll only stay," he urged. "Come, sit here on the stairs with me, and I'll read you *Philaster*."

"No, not on the Lord's Day."

"Then you read Scripture to me."

"I'll have no more dealings with you till you've made peace with my brother for this last," Nan answered steadily from the lower hall.

Before she could pass into the parlor she heard his voice again: "Mistress Nan! Nan!" Looking up, she saw that he had knelt upon the staircase and was gazing down at her over the hand-rail. "Why did you trudge off to Sagamore Zimri's last week to expound the Scriptures to his wives?" he questioned.

"Why, to aid their poor heathen souls," she answered.

"Isn't mine as well worth saving?" he asked, and, as she turned vexedly away, she heard him laugh.

It was the last she or any of the household heard of Christopher for many days. Next morning he did not come to breakfast, and when at last the serving-wench knocked at his door and entered, the chamber was empty. Penniless, so far as his kinsfolk knew, he had taken his fowling-piece and gone away. "He's with Trull's gang, doubtless," Calderwood dismissed the subject, but Trull, when questioned, swore "No." On the third night, however, the village of Meadowcreek was relieved of all anxiety which it may have felt on the score of Christopher Ferringham:

The Constable Gleason went early to bed that night in the chamber in the second story of his house. The night was stiflingly hot, so his windows stood wide, and the mosquitoes, entering freely, broke his rest. At the last, when it seemed he had just fallen into sound sleep, a new noise roused him. Far down the street, but nearer and louder each instant, some one was singing:—

" 'Drink to-day and drown all sorrow,
Perhaps you will not do it to-morrow.' "

"What's that?" Jane Gleason asked sharply. "You constable of the town, and suffer such night-walkers be abroad! Fie on you, man! Rise up!"

Bumping his shins against the corners of the multiplied furniture, Gleason stumbled toward the window. The singing now had ceased, but right below in his house-yard a voice rose insistent: "Hey, Master Constable, be ye waking?"

"'Tis Christopher Ferringham," Gleason spoke resignedly, and thrust his head forth at the window; below in the dusk of the house-yard he made out a man's black figure. "Get home to your bed, you rapscallion," he advised practically.

"Hold, take you that!" cried Christopher's voice.

Something hard plumped in at the window and fell with a metallic clang to the floor. "What's that?" asked Gleason.

"Five pounds in good silver," answered Christopher. "I'll

take that number of oaths, if't please you. Ten shillings an oath, two to the pound, that's ten. Hark you now!" At the top of his lungs he began swearing, artistic, selected oaths, fit to crack the turf. Along the dark street windows began to fly open.

Gleason stumbled across the room, clapped into a few garments, and, running to the door, fell over a stool. "Pest on it!" quoth the overwrought Constable.

"That I should live to see this day!" Jane Gleason cried.

Her husband slammed to the door upon her chidings, and, hurrying down the stairs, flung open the house-door and stepped into the night. Across the way anxious voices called and questioned; but the yard was vacant, and the roadway, stretching off into blackness, was deserted, save that back along it was borne a cheerful voice:—

" 'Best while ye have it use your breath,
There is no drinking after death.' "

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENOCH-CHASE

ON the day after the summary breaking of the Constable's rest Ziba Trull lounged into Calderwood's house-yard and delivered to the Magistrate a letter. It was written, Calderwood perceived, on the title-page of a book of *Merry Tales*, with a blunted pen and waterish ink, in an orthography noteworthy even in an age of lawless spelling:—

GODE UNCLE: Praye doe nott weepe for mee nor have oute the Towne Cryer, for I have gon a-hunteing with Webbe Hayn & I will not com backe till my Haire bee growne. Commende mee to ye Householde & telle little Taffy I wille ketch him a Squerel.

Youre evver loveinge nephewe,

XTOPHER FERINGHAME.

I have payd Zibba 6d to delivver you these so if he doe nott he is a Knave and I praye you Kicke himm.

Not only the last statement, but the whole letter, proved, on Calderwood's investigation, to be true; Webb Hayne, the ex-poacher, was gone from Meadowcreek, and in his company Christopher Ferringham, gentleman, had disappeared. His aunt fretted a little, but his uncle, in no doubt as to the young man's ability to guard his own head, endured with patience the peaceful days that followed in his household, till, when sullen August had near worn out its course, Christopher returned.

Elizabeth Calderwood, who kept her girlhood's practice of shaping with her own hands the household pasties, was at work in the kitchen one morning, alone, save for little David,

when she heard a joyful cry from the child, "My cousin Cwistopher's tummin," and right upon that a well-remembered stamp on the doorstone. Next instant the prodigal took her into a vigorous embrace, and released her with the usual demand: "Good, sweet aunt, is there aught in the house to eat? 'Fore George! I'm nigh starved, and choked too. By this good light! I've swallowed naught but spring water for a twelvemonth."

The same Christopher, certainly, only grimmer as to the shirt, more tattered as to the stockings, unshaven, with his head, that plainly had suffered throughout a close clipping, now thatched with a soft yellow-brown growth, so short that the cowlicks appeared more conspicuous than ever; but underneath the rudiments of the old forelock were the same blue-gray eyes with the devil in them, and the same cheerfully aggressive voice reëchoed through the low kitchen: "Yes, aunt, a whang o' bread and some honey, prithee. 'Tis hard on the heels of dinner, is't not? And here's thy squirrel, Taffy. 'Hath rid in my pocket these two days. Gently, gently! A' is a wee one, but his teeth are grown."

While David squeezed the hapless baby squirrel, and Christopher, swinging his legs from the kitchen table, devoured bread and honey, the three small Calderwoods rushed in. They were eager with questions that rose to a babel of admiration when they learned that Christopher had been clear to Nashua, and lived with the Indians, and shot a black bear with Hayne's musket, but in the midst the hero cast a glance out at the kitchen window and dismounted headlong from the table. "'Tis your aunt Nan is coming!" he cried, with a sweep of the hand across his rough chin. "Fetch me some hot water to my chamber, Jack, that's my sweet lad!"

When next he showed himself, at dinner, he was clean and shaven and brushed, jaunty as of old, with a happy assumption that all the household, rejoiced to have him back, were eager to hear what had befallen him. On such satisfied mood

Calderwood's dry speech fell with the shock of a douche of cold water: "Perchance you have not been so long among savages and masterless men to forget what befell the night you went from Meadowcreek. Unless you want to answer legally for the notable insolence you showed in braving the Constable, — and I can foresee you will be fetched into court times enough without this, — do you go make your submission to him and get his forgiveness, if you can, ere the week be out."

Christopher's face grew ruefully sober at that, but he laughed off his discomfiture and rose from dinner with a defiant announcement that he thought he would go speak with his comrades, whom he had not tarried to see as he came through the woods. "Hark you, Christopher," his uncle checked him on the threshold, "you can save yourself the trouble of seeking your friends at the den they builded upon my woodland. The habitation of the wicked hath perished."

"So you and Enoch Gleason have plucked down the hemmel?" Christopher asked, after a blank instant. "It can be built again, sir."

"You may lay it to heart, cousin, that if any man set one log upon another, there on my land, to build up such another nest of abomination, I shall have him whipped for such trespass, even though the culprit be you yourself. Pray you, do not mouth out curses here," he added, with a weary disgust that made Christopher quit the house in silence.

Beyond the dooryard, however, when he had headed toward the woods, he vented his feelings in curses a-plenty. He ask pardon of the Constable, forsooth! and the hemmel was down! That, after all, was the heavier news, so away he trudged to discuss it with his comrades. Ziba Trull's cabin was most likely now to be their rendezvous, and, as he had been there on the night of his departure from Meadowcreek, he easily found the beaten way thither. A trail, branching out from the village street, ran by the Constable's orchard, cut through one end of the long swamp beyond that now was dry, and, skirt-

ing Gleason's fields along the brook, brought him through a close-grown woodlot into Trull's farmstead.

On this, his first daylight visit, the hut of logs and thatch seemed to Christopher less attractive than the hemmel: instead of the fresh forest an unkempt, hot clearing pressed upon the low hovel; the men, losing the woodland setting that had made them something of degenerate descendants of Robin Hood, looked poor rascals; and an added squalor came into the life with the presence of women. Old Nance Mingy, a toothless remnant of a woman, whose mere look justified her ill fame of a witch, cowered in the chimney corner, while her daughter, Trull's wife, a full-hipped, red-cheeked baggage, bustled to and fro with a heightened jauntiness which Christopher knew was for his edification. When she fetched him a can of beer, where he sat on the threshold, and, while he drank, stood eying him, he noted her drearily, from the bare ankles that showed between the frayed edge of her petticoat and the tops of her moccasins, to the kerchief knotted loosely about her neck; and he said, so perfunctorily that it went close to a jeer, "On my truth, Ziba, I see why ye never bade me under your roof till I bade myself!"

Joan Trull laughed loudly, and swaggered back to the table about which her husband and Hayne and Killion were slouching. All spoke of the lost hemmel, the thing uppermost in their minds, and of Enoch Gleason. It was not upon Master Calderwood that the volume of their obscene wrath was poured, but upon Enoch who, searching at odd times, had at last rediscovered the hemmel and trained on the Magistrate to its overthrow. There would be no more dicing and card-playing, no more drinking, no more hours of contented lazing, secure from interruption of constable or tithingman, and, even worse, Killion and Hayne, the actual builders of the hemmel, had, on the discovery of their trespass, been haled into court and provided with responsible masters. Hayne was turned over to Winlock Presgrave, who dwelt at the southern end of

the township, and Killion, trying hard to persuade a sceptic community that his collar bone had not knit and he was unable to work, was delivered into the hands of Raham Mawry. The miller was one who suffered no shirking in his household; Killion was in the blackest temper, and, laying his discomfort to Enoch Gleason, swore all painful-sounding vengeance on him.

"An old woman's trick to prate!" muttered Goody Mingy, while Joan laughed: "Unpack thyself in words, Dearthmont, do now. *You* hurt Captain Enoch! Go to! A' is a cleverer man than ye all, and will worst ye all again, 'less Master Kester Ferringham there sets his fine wits on work."

But Kester Ferringham's fine wits had to beat that week on a matter of greater moment to himself, though it, too, pertained to the Gleasons. The days slipped along, and still his apology to the Constable was untendered, and still the possibility of another summons to court, which became a probability when he studied his uncle's frigid bearing, loomed before him. To a penniless man a possible fine had its terrors. "I cannot cut my hair to soothe them this time,"—Christopher ran his fingers through his short crop as he ventured a plaint which he hoped might stir Nan to her old sympathy—"Damme but I've no more than my scalp now with which to satisfy them!"

The last day of his week of grace came, and still he had devised no plan of action beyond the resolve that he would not go on such an errand to Gleason's house, where the Constable's shrewish wife and Captain Enoch might witness his humiliation. So about mid-afternoon he loitered into the smithy, and there by good luck he found the Constable, in leather apron and huge iron-bowed spectacles, who, at the bench alongside the narrow window, was tinkering a pistol. Two loungers, however, were in the shop—Benoni Pritchard and Raham Mawry, who was waiting for his pistol. Benoni favored Christopher with a friendly nod, but the two graver men bent their brows upon him with a contemptuous curiosity that was disconcerting.

"Will it fall amiss if I take tobacco here, Master Constable?" Christopher prefaced, and was cut short by a tranquil "Twere as well if you waited till you were bidden."

"By your leave, then, I'll no more than breathe," drawled Christopher, and, setting himself astride a form near the workbench, put his unlit pipe between his teeth. "Now, Master Constable," he began pleasantly, "you must know that against my will I am sent to tender you my apologies. And I am glad for't that I can say in all honesty that I be sorry to the very roots of my soul for what I did the night ere I quit Meadowcreek. 'Twas five pounds o' good money I wasted that it took me a whole night over the dice — a hot night, too, and a pest on't! — to earn; 'twas enough to have bought me a horse — of a kind — and there's not a day the last month that I've not grieved for the mad way I rid myself of it, so I'll pledge you my word as a gentleman I shall never offend you in such manner again."

Throughout this apology the Constable, with his brows bent over the work, had been adjusting the mechanism of the pistol, and now in the pause the little click of his pliers became audible. Only when he had finished, did he remove his owl-like spectacles and over Christopher's head address Mawry patiently: "Did you hear him, Raham?"

"I said I was sorry and would never so offend again," Christopher spoke in a hurt tone. "Would you have a gentleman humble himself further, sir?"

"None the less, I shan't push you into court for it," — Gleason ignored his expostulation — "and it's neither through love nor fear to you that I do't, for you're deserving neither. But you'll drag disgrace enough upon your uncle, whom I respect, without aid o' mine. And now this stithy is no place for a gentleman, so the brisker you take yourself out of it and the longer you stay away from it, the more I'll be beholden to you."

"On my soul, I can't praise your hospitality!" Christopher

forced a laugh as he rose to his feet, when just there Pritchard had to babble, "Be ye for Trull's house now, Kester?"

"Kester, is it, they call you?" struck in the Constable. "I'm thinking the Kestrel would fit ye nearer."

Quite undesignedly Gleason there launched a shaft that, minute though it seemed, rankled. For Mawry and Pritchard, each in a different circle of cronies that together included the whole village, spread the by-name abroad till all Meadowcreek had firmly fixed it to Christopher; the older men, English-bred and knowing something of falconry, were as well aware as Christopher himself that the kestrel was the basest and most worthless kind of hawk. So much of a sneer was in the title that the young man at first tried to shake it off; he even, one afternoon in the alehouse when Daniel Mawry put the name to him, took the offender a box on the ear. Young Daniel, a decent lad, after all, made no legal complaint, and the matter was hushed over by the company, but Christopher realized he had not bettered his position. He could not buffet all Meadowcreek, the women and the shrill children as well as the men, so, with brazen change of front, he announced that when one gave a man a by-name 'twas a sign of affection; he was proud to find his neighbors esteemed him so lovingly, and henceforth he answered hardily to the name of the Kestrel.

He knew well enough, however, that no love for him was in the Meadowcreek folk; the frowns of graver men, the bitter comments of women, as he swaggered through the village street, and — what went near to cutting him — the terror with which small children fled from his path, all let him know how his neighbors regarded him. An unhallowed reputation was crystallizing about him: he was a disturber of worship, a blasphemer, a drunkard, a gamester, a pick-quarrel — Meadowcreek could with some truth declare it had seen evidence to this with its own eyes. From that it was but a step — catching up here a loose turn of speech of the man's, making use there of a kiss, snatched half willingly from a pretty serving-maid

on the highway, bearing in mind always the sinister group at Trull's cabin of which young Ferringham made one — and, to the rest, Meadowcreek blasted him with the evil fame of a common wench.

Under this weight of obloquy Christopher carried his shoulders square and his head erect; if Meadowcreek feared and despised him, why, he for his part wished naught of the sour Puritans, but strode off to take his pleasure with Ziba Trull, or away to Boston, where, he had unhappily discovered, was a society that did not scorn him. Maverick of Noddle's Island was a hearty soul, the Puritan law did not reach to the ships that rode in the harbor, and the very freedom of manner that made his Meadowcreek neighbors look on him with suspicion, won for the young fellow friends among the shipmen.

He knew now where to find comrades with whom to drink and game, with his newly acquired bale of dice, and presently — to his bitter after-misfortune — he knew where to have money. Maverick, with light assumption that Christopher was man-grown and able to guard himself, gave him a letter to a Boston merchant, one Michael Gamlyn, who from the state of a bond-servant had risen to a competence. A devout church-goer, he sandwiched Scriptural phrases between his legal quiddities, while he lent to Christopher at ten per cent on the expectations he had from his grandfather, and vowed to keep the transaction secret. Christopher looked on the fat quill-driver with scarcely masked contempt, and, pocketing up the money, went whistling forth.

He felt like himself now, with ready coin jingling in his pockets, and, loath to be selfish of his good fortune, he bought the prettiest ivory-handled knife he could find in the town and carried it home to Nan. She had been distant of late, and he had longed for the comradeship of the time before he went away with Hayne. It was hard work to find her alone, but he watched and the second morning came upon her as she

nailed up the honeysuckle by the hall door. He had something to show her, he said, and drew out the knife.

Nan mumbled a delighted "Oh!" and took the tacks out of her mouth to admire more fully. She stood close to him, and her fingers, as she took the dainty knife, touched his. "You like it?" he asked, with a vexed sense that against all habit he was awkward as a ploughboy giving his wench a fairing. "Tis for you."

She flashed him a quick look of delight, and then the pleasure faded from her eyes and lips. She wanted the knife with all her heart; there was little giving of gifts there at Lastbrook while Calderwood tied up his moneys in lands and flocks and strove to build a fortune for his children. She liked pretty things, and her fingers petted the ivory handle, but she faltered, "Christopher, I thank you — but you should not have bought it for me — how came you —"

"I won some money at dice." He hid what he felt instinctively were the more serious truth.

"I feared so!" she sighed, and resolutely held out the knife. "I can't take it." Her heart misgave her as she saw it go from her. "Unless Nate says I may," she added wistfully.

"I didn't buy it for him," said Christopher, and went away with a look both hurt and angry that spoiled the entire morning for Nan.

She was completely turned from him, he reflected bitterly; there were no pleasant readings or long, lazy talks with her now, for always when she stirred abroad she kept Lucy or one of the boys at her side. The base Meadowcreek view of him had come to Lastbrook, so even Elizabeth looked on him with distressed eyes; and half the many tales to his discredit, Christopher was sure, rode thither on the same horse with Captain Gleason. The *Gilliflower* in few weeks would hoist sail for Antigua, and, as if to make the most of his time, Enoch, with his loud voice and hearty manner of the honest man, was ever at the farm and ever in speech with Nan.

"Let her go, the proud jade!" Christopher swore, and was sorely amazed when he realized that course was now difficult. He tried to make himself believe that he did it but to vex Enoch and tease Nan, but at heart he knew it was as a half-tortured witness to what he guessed was Gleason's wooing, that he hung about the house, that he made one, defiantly, in the decorous gatherings in the parlor, and that he used Nan's old invitation to join her and Enoch under the pine trees. Once when the Captain, letting his righteous contempt for this idle waster break through his careless civility, greeted him as the Kestrel, he had the instant's satisfaction of hearing Nan say with displeasure, "Prithee, Enoch, my kinsman is not known to me by any name save Christopher." But that was no more than an instant, for most times, spite of the girl's studied courtesy, even as a result of it, he felt himself hopelessly unwelcome.

Yet he stuck by the two; a woman with eyes must see in time the difference between him and Enoch. To Christopher's thinking, everything about his rival, manners and garments alike, bespoke the churl who would be a gentleman; he wore a scarlet waistcoat with a murrey-colored doublet, and on occasion he would mount a horse without proper riding-boots. The only one of Enoch's belongings that by accident was fitting was his riding-gloves. Christopher chanced to take them up one afternoon. He had sauntered out under the trees where the girl and her wooer were sitting, and, with a studiedly pleasant word of greeting, dropped down on the pine needles near them; for once there was real vexation in Nan's glance, and Enoch, giving him not so much as a "How do you," lowered his voice to finish what he had to say. Christopher, lying along the ground, picked up one of the gloves the Captain had flung by, and bent his eyes upon it; he dared not look up, lest he read in Nan's face the fact that it was the clenching question which the Captain was asking. After all, it came over him, something more than his pride as a successful gallant was going to suffer if Enoch had good speed. He noted that the glove he held was

of Spanish leather with a green stitching about the wrist, and he wondered that at so keen a moment he should make count of such trifling details.

He tossed by the glove, conscious at last of the undignified part he played, and sauntered away toward the stable. The late afternoon light was waning, and in the clean shadow of the building Lucy stood feeding the chickens; that Nan had forgotten them was but another proof of her hopeless absorption in Gleason. With sudden scatter of the clucking feasters, he strode up to Lucy. "Tell me, cousin," he demanded, "do you think your aunt Nan will wed Enoch Gleason? Now don't go babble this to her, child," he added, with a sane afterthought.

Lucy ran her fingers through the corn she held in her apron. "There's no reading a maid's whim, is there, Christopher? Maybe she will, maybe—not. Enoch could maintain her well," she reasoned, with a practical streak that became her drolly. "But—" her eyes flashed into his— "Oh, Christopher, say she married—Somebody Else!"

Christopher laughed outright. "She might marry better than Enoch," he said lightly; and to himself he added, as he turned away, "And by the Lord! she shall. Even though I marry her myself." The thought gave him pause for an instant; marriage seemed to him so little seductive that he had never wronged Nan by connecting her with it. Nevertheless, he believed he would endure even that, sooner than yield forever the comradeship in which he had pleased himself, sooner than see her in Enoch Gleason's arms. But when he looked on her that night at supper, all flushed with the happiness of her afternoon with that fellow, a chill doubt gripped him: could he draw her from Enoch only by the masterful saying, "I want you"? The new self-distrust made him sulky all that evening; and next morning, hopeless of the fight, he plunged away into the woods.

His wanderings this time were brief; Dearmont Killion and

Hayne, willy-nilly, were at work, so he was alone in the forest, and when the third night brought rain, his courage was quenched. On the fourth morning, after his clothes were near dried with the heat of the brisk sun, he strolled into such civilization as Trull's cabin afforded, where he could at least hope for a pottle of small beer. Ziba was not there; he had lain the night before at Romney Marsh, where he had hired himself to do a piece of work, Joan chattered. She it was who fetched Christopher the beer, and stood by to talk while he swallowed it, for the old mother was pottering in the untidy garden patch; through the opening where the door sagged wide, Christopher could watch her bent figure tottering among the weeds.

When he thrust by his can and rose, "Here, lass," he cried, "I've never a penny to pay the scot. Take a kiss instead."

"Go to! Y'are saucy!" she retorted, with a show of resisting.

He had cast his arm about her neck, and now, his hand gripping firmly, her flimsy bodice was rent, and as she flung away from him, something that had lain in her bosom fell to the floor. Before she could spring to seize it, he had snatched it up—a riding-glove of Spanish leather with green stitching about the wrist. "So ho ho, boy!" cried Christopher, and, tossing up the glove, caught it in his hand as she clutched at it.

"Give it me, Kester Ferringham!" she panted. "Thou devil! give it me!"

Vituperation, and plenty of it, she poured out upon him, to which he did but grin as he asked, "And Ziba lay yesternight at Romney Marsh, eh?"

"An you tell him"—she changed from the vituperative to the plaintive and fell a-whimpering—"an you tell Ziba, he'll go nigh to killing me—"

"Tut, tut! Ziba's no Roman; a' is a practical man," laughed

Christopher, and, with her outcries shrilling in his ears, walked away homeward. He went briskly and whistled as he went; once he stopped to turn the glove in his hand and laugh to himself.

"Yes, I have been a-hunting," he answered his aunt's queries when he entered the farmhouse, "hunting a beast that hath neither fur, feathers, nor fins, and hang me but I'm hot on the trail!"

He followed the trail that noon a good distance farther than he had dared to hope; for, on coming down from his room, he met in the kitchen Enoch Gleason, who had ridden thither to dine with Calderwood. The Magistrate was just back from Boston, and he brought a harassing rumor that the blasphemous and immoral folk called Quakers were like to seek entrance into Massachusetts. Inevitably, as they sat at meat, the talk of the two men turned on immoral crime and its fit punishment. "A rigorous law and unswervingly enforced, I would have, even the severity of the Scriptures themselves," Calderwood argued.

"One enforced, too, whatever the rank of the culprit," assented Gleason.

Christopher felt that they looked perhaps for his ears to burn, and meantime he tranquilly ate his dinner—roasted mutton and cranberry sauce, the latter a New England dainty for which he had a liking.

"There is no vice that so doth dry up the vital springs of a commonwealth at their very fountain head," pursued the Magistrate.

"All unworthy of a man, too," blundered the bluff Captain, eager to echo him.

Christopher laid down his knife, and, fumbling in his pocket, cast on the table before Enoch a glove of Spanish leather. "You've lost your glove," he said, and the blankness that for an instant swept over Enoch's face made him know the man was lying, for all the glib tone in which he answered: "My

glove? I thank you, Ferringham; I lost it in the wood yesternorn."

"It lay in a dry place, I'm thinking," Christopher drawled. "The rain hath not marred it." With which he returned to his cranberry sauce.

But whatever Calderwood and his family made of the encounter, Christopher knew that Enoch understood, so it was quite what he expected when, dinner ended, the Captain prayed him step out to the stable and view his horse which he thought to sell ere he put forth to sea. Quite expected it was, too, when, as they stood alone in the vast stable, Enoch swung round on him: "Now, sirrah, you with your glove, what means this?"

"Well crowed for a dung-hill cock!" applauded Christopher, hands in pockets, head thrown back in the mocking figure of a cockerel. "It means, sirrah, there be birds of a different strain now in Meadowcreek; it means while ye bill with a certain hen ye were best hold off from a certain dainty chick, else there be cocks will make a capon of you." With the word in his mouth he turned to Williams, who just then entered the stable: "Here, Bray, 'tis fowls, not horses, the Captain would speak on, and I'm no farmer."

Not a farmer he was, indeed, but a hunter, those days that preceded the sailing of the *Gilliflower*, almost too busied in the woods to take note of Nan, or to heed Enoch's presence at Lastbrook. For he had called his mates to council, Hayne and Killion, still sullenly angered at the man who had dispossessed them of the hemmel, Trull, who under the mockery of his comrades dared no longer be inactive, and Crozier. The latter oddly clenched the matter, when the danger of undertaking the discipline of such a man as Captain Gleason made the others shrink. "I'm thinking lechery is an awfu' sin," the old soldier of the Kirk spoke sternly, and heart and soul forwarded Christopher's schemes.

The Assistants' Court sat toward the close of September, and

a week beforehand Calderwood, anxious over his approaching harvest, let his family know that he would not ride to Boston the day before the session but, to save so much time, would make an early start for the town on the morning of Court Day itself. It was no great pleasure to him when, on the eve of that day, his nephew asked: "Will you wake me when you rise to-morrow, uncle? I've passed Rinyon my word to go with him a-fowling on the marsh early ere work begin, and I'm so fast a sleeper I'm like to over-lie my time. So I'll be going early to bed now, if it please you." It was no more than half after seven, but he took his candle and yawningly stumbled away to his chamber.

He answered drowsily to the second summons which Calderwood, in the damp darkness of next morning, conscientiously gave him, and, ere the Magistrate had made his hasty breakfast at the table-corner under the dull candlelight, he came tramping into the kitchen, all in fowling trim. He was going at once for the village, would be halfway thither ere Calderwood overtook him, he called back from the doorstone; there was a deadened note in his voice on the lifeless morning air.

Indeed, he was more than halfway to Meadowcreek when Calderwood, on horseback, came up with him, and, yielding to the impulse of civility, slackened speed so his nephew could keep pace at his side. The slow dawn was coming in grayly; the woods on either hand, branchless and leafless, presented but dim masses; the sea, when the road wound into open country, rolled vague and gray into the gray sky. On the outskirts of the village the cottages had an eyeless look; scarce so much as the clatter of a shutter or stir of restless cattle in their stalls broke the dead hush, and the heaviness of the hour weighed upon the travellers so they, too, kept silence.

But as they pashed into the gray sand of the market place, Calderwood pulled up his horse with a sharp exclamation: "What is yonder? there by the whipping-post?"

"Sure, I see not—" Christopher had begun, when Calderwood, with no stay to hear, swung his horse to the centre of

the market place and sprang down alongside the whipping-post.

It was a man who stood there, back to the post, bound fast, gagged; his head had drooped forward on his breast, but Calderwood, thrusting a hand beneath his chin, turned to the pale light the face of Enoch Gleason. "What outrage have we here? Bring help, Christopher. The man is nigh swooned," he ordered, and fumbled to loosen the gag.

Alongside the whipping-post stood the stout joists that formed the town stocks; Christopher jumped upon the top-most and, clapping both hands to his mouth, raised a whoop that brought life to blank windows and set shutters crashing open. Doors banged, and men — half-clad, coatless, uncombed, — came straggling into the market place, to press questioning round the whipping-post.

Christopher, knife in hand, was so assiduous in cutting Gleason's bonds that all explanations of the sufferer's plight fell to Calderwood. For Gleason himself, stiff with the cramping agony of his long confinement, half choked with the gag, there was no word from him, spite of the sympathetic questions of his neighbors, till he stood free once more; then he stammered forth, as the busy Christopher cut the last rope about his ankles, "You — you dare — play the Samaritan now — you foul, cogging —"

"Tut, tut! Best take him home, Master Constable," soothed Christopher. "'Heart! but he's nigh delirious, poor soul! Who used you so, Captain? Can you tell?"

Gleason made a stiff movement, as if he would have struck at Ferringham, had not the Constable caught his arm.

"I'm fearing you may have been night-walking," Christopher spoke soberly. "'Tis a dangerous trade, sir. Henceforth best go to your bed at half after seven, as I did yesternight."

"Pray you, stand back," Calderwood interrupted, and his nephew, with face of innocence, was obliged to take his heel from the gag which he had quietly been grinding into the dirt;

the Magistrate pocketed the rag, and, with no further speech, followed the Gleasons to the Constable's house.

There was no court for Calderwood that day. Hour after hour, while Meadowcreek gossiped and shook its head, and strange old stories of swaggering, sanguine Captain Enoch went abroad, he strove to get at the wherefore of the business, and was baffled. For the main sufferer by the outrage had naught to say; he had gone forth after supper to look to his father's upper cornland where prowlers had been at work; he had been attacked — "from behind," he urged — by he knew not whom, and placed ignominiously as he had been found. No, he had no enemies, he could not guess who had wrought this; he would swear on suspicion against no man who might be innocent, he declared nobly.

In the end Calderwood rode home to search his nephew's chamber, by virtue of his magistracy, and to await the young man's coming. Supper was over at the farm, and he had sat down to write in the parlor that was half his study, when at last he heard Christopher laughing in the kitchen, and sternly called to him. The smile was still upon the culprit's face when, closing the door scrupulously behind him, he stood within the parlor. "Come hither," Calderwood bade. "Is not this your handkerchief?"

Christopher, at his elbow, gazed down at the bitten rag that had silenced Enoch Gleason. "Ay, sir," he nodded. "Have you spent the whole day tracing this out? I'd 'a' told you all, sir."

"Take heed. I am a magistrate, and this matter is too serious to wink at."

Christopher hesitated, then took from among the books on the table at which his uncle sat, the *New England's Prospect* of Master William Wood, and, seating himself astride a chair, rested the open volume on the back of it. "Listen here, sir: Concerning the beasts that live on the land. The Enoch is a stout beast that hath the use of his voice very ready, and,

although he prate loudly of the way of the saints, walketh much in such trails as do other creatures. For 'tis the ill hap of this poor thing that where its penny'orth of boiled brains bids it go orderly in the way of the righteous, its appetites are as other men's, and thereto it lacks the courage boldly to avow itself. For which this beast doth seek its prey by stealthy paths, which do not at all times avail it. For there be other beasts who by nature do war upon the Enoch; of these be certain beasts that, being driven forth of their burrows, grow fierce, and also the bird called the Kestrel, to whom it is sweeter themselves to hunt the Enoch than to see him overtaken by — well, by such beasts, saving your reverence, as magistrates. Now the Enoch is a wary creature, but these beagles proved cunning even as himself, and, taking him at last at the quarry, they did deal by him even as the Magistrate-Beast, in the like case, had dealt by one of them. And the Enoch that is at last a timid animal, doth fear the Magistrate a jot more than he doth fear these beagles, so he never durst whimper — nor damme! will he go about now to beleper another man's name," Christopher concluded in his ordinary dialect, as he slammed to the book.

Calderwood sat with knitted brows. "You have not been made judge to punish in this jurisdiction, Christopher Ferringham. Even if there be truth in this — Gleason may have you into court for assault."

"If he have me into court for assault," Christopher yawned, as he took his candle from the table, "I can have him up the gallows' stair for worse."

CHAPTER IX

AFTER THE REAPING

It was of a morning late in September, with a hint of rime in the air, that the *Gilliflower* put to sea. Under the chill, half-risen sun a score or more of Meadowcreek folk gathered on the wharf to watch Captain Gleason, who had lain the night on land, take boat for his vessel. There was a scuffling of chilled feet on the planks, a swinging of arms, a good-natured cuff or two exchanged among the men — young fellows, for the most, serving-men and the like, for none of the elder, responsible townsfolk who a month before would have come thither to wish their neighbor a God-speed, were present.

Though the law had ignored the Captain, the church in which he held membership could not do so; only the last Sabbath Enoch Gleason had stood forth before the congregation to hear sentence of excommunication pronounced upon him. Graver men prayed for his repentance and shunned him; the rapscallionry, whose lapses he had so loudly condemned, stood by to jeer his departure. Killion, Trull, Hayne, all were there, and the Kestrel himself, who swung his heels from the great post at the end of the wharf, was the first to spy the Captain approaching and pass the word along.

Enoch came down the wharf, alone, save for his father, the Constable, with a broken effort at his old swagger. His face, dogged and white, betrayed his consciousness of the half-audible comments and snickers of his fellow-townsmen, but not a word did he fling in reply till, as he came to the end of the wharf, he looked up and met Ferringham's gaze. "You'll

take note, good folk," he swung round upon the crowd, "I have deserved my punishment, and I bow to the Lord's will; 'tis that I must come by it at such vile hands doth grieve me."

Christopher spat down into the water. "Good speed to you with the brown wenches at St. John's!" he said, whereat those who lined the wharf laughed outright.

Enoch, about to go down the steps to the waiting boat, wheeled round. "The devil twist out your gibing tongue!" he shouted uncontrollably. "As God hears me, I'll live to make ye laugh the other side o' your damned face!"

"Peace, peace!" the Constable silenced his son, and hurried him down the steps. The boat shot forth from the shadow of the wharf, its black bulk waxed smaller till the faces of the occupants grew dim, but never once did the Captain in the stern glance back at the home-shore.

Thus Enoch sailed away, with the word he would have said to Nan unspoken, and Nan herself, hard little Puritan, drove him from her thoughts. Not a tear had she shed for her wooer's disgrace, and not a word of sorrow for him had passed her lips; the only sign of sympathy she gave was that on the sad Lord's Day of the excommunication she stayed from meeting on the plea of illness. Indeed, her face was haggard and wretched, so that Christopher, with a fear that in his forcing of events he had struck further than he planned, blundered at words of comfort. "It is that my heart is wrung for poor Goodwife Gleason," she answered him steadily. "He is the only son is left her; she loves him so. And oh! the poor Constable, he hath not deserved this." But never a word of pity had she for Enoch, the sinner, or of blame for Christopher, the instrument of the All-seeing Judge who brings sin to light.

Upon this negative result of Enoch's fall succeeded for Christopher the positive boon he scarcely dared hope, of his own rehabilitation with Nan. For when Enoch, who had vented the most evil stories concerning the Kestrel, proved

himself besmirched, Nan cast aside his testimony. He had seemed good, and he was an ignoble hypocrite; all the better in her eyes was the man who had never made pretence at virtue. Christopher, for all his faults, was honest, and even granting his faults, what was boy's mischief beside deadly sin? Not only was she friendly to him as in the early summer, but, because she repented the ill thoughts of him that in the last weeks she had harbored, she was a shade more friendly even than before.

So Christopher found himself restored to his old footing in the household — free to walk or talk or read with Nan; openly championed by Elizabeth Calderwood, who took placid satisfaction in retorting on Jane Gleason some of the biting taunts which the Constable's wife had flung at her nephew; and even viewed with the old half-contemptuous tolerance by Calderwood, who had received another lesson in the danger of hastily judging men. After a first still anger at the insult offered his sister, the Magistrate had resolutely walked in a lenient course and refused to strip Enoch, young enough for effectual penitence, of his office on the *Gilliflower*. Yet with the same evenhandedness he did not punish Christopher's illegal share in the man's exposure, but, lecturing his nephew gravely on the need of watching over his own lapses ere he meddled with those of others, let the matter pass.

But though the Enoch-Chase had bettered Christopher's position in his uncle's household, it profited him never a whit in Meadowcreek. The village that had seen him cast down one of its strongest sons feared him the more, and in proportion hated him. A little reaction of sympathy for Captain Gleason, too, was felt; his punishment was merited, but that such a hand should pluck him down was hard. "If a stand before the pastor's desk befit poor young Enoch, sure, the pilory were your place, my fine sir!" Dorcas Pritchard called after Christopher, the first time he sauntered by her gate.

Not so black as he was painted, perhaps, still Christopher

was not an inoffensive youth. A bale of dice dwelt in his pocket, his score on the alehouse hatch grew longer, Trull's cabin knew him better and better, and—a peculiarity that developed at harvest time—his neighbors' cornfields and orchards also knew him. Trained in the foraging school of the Royalist horse, Christopher's views as to proprietary rights in the fruits of the earth were rudimentary. "What do you mean, sir? 'Sdeath! I'm no thief," he expostulated, when Master Atherton caught him on the wrong side of his orchard paling. "I did but take to eat thereof. I'd not steal a farthing's worth of yours."

But Atherton, who held thief and gamester excellent synonyms, and remembered, too, the disgrace into which Ferringham had led his son, brought the delinquent into court, where Christopher found that his uncle, with the same harsh interpretation of his act, fined him treble the value of the fruit pilfered, or six shillings. It was at a penniless time with Christopher, but the alternative for this misdemeanor, to be "openly whipt," was not to be thought on in the case of a gentleman. Calderwood paid his fine, just as he had paid two previous fines for Sabbath breaking. "It is from the five pounds your grandfather put in my hands for you," he explained to his nephew. "What slight store you can lay claim to, you will speedily devour by these merry courses of yours."

Hitherto Christopher had laughed at his court experiences, but this that set thief to the rest of his ill titles rankled. "'Sblood! 'tis none but a niggard would deny an armful of roasting-ears or a pocketful of apples to his fellow-men," he announced next day. He was lounging on the bench before the alehouse, and he spoke not so much for the benefit of Hayne and Pritchard, who had heard the like before, as for the Constable Gleason, who stood in the doorway in speech with Goodman Naylor.

Gleason caught up the challenge: "That's a pretty doc-

trine, Master Kestrel, but I warn you and your friends not to put it in practice again by pulling corn in my upper field."

"Dare us, do you?" Christopher rapped out. "Then set up your crow-keepers, Master Constable, and 'ware beak and claws!"

Indeed, for three nights the Constable, realizing the hardihood of offering a dare, set his serving-man, Gershom Field, to keep strict watch in the upper cornland. All was peaceful, so peaceful that on the fourth night no watch was set, and when Meadowcreek rose next morning, upon the ridgepole of the Constable's barn the cart that had stood in the yard below straddled uncertainly, with the long leaves and stiff stalks of a fine load of corn trailing over its sides.

Seth Govis, Master Atherton's man, first discovered this monstrosity, and scudded away to his master with the tidings that the Constable's barn was bewitched. Atherton stalked forth incredulous, stared, then roused up the Constable and spread the story through the village. Soon all Meadowcreek—men hoarse in argument, children wide-eyed with wonder, women shrill with suggestion—swarmed in the Constable's dooryard. So monstrous a suspicion was in the air that Master Trescott did not hold it beneath him to make one of the throng, and, at the other end of the scale, came Dearmont and Hayne and Crozier, and Kester Ferringham, with his cousin Jack at his heels; they had been out a-fowling early, he explained, and had happened into the village.

But the Kestrel, worker of petty misdemeanors, swung his heels from the well curb almost unregarded now, while about him supposition was heaped on supposition. To all the deductions of his neighbors the obdurate Constable shook his head: "I don't think 'tis witchery, sirs;" but his wife, enjoying to the full the awesome situation, cried out that 'twas witchcraft, as one could see with half an eye, and who should be the devil's agent but old Nance Mingy?

Gleason still scoffed and would not stir, but Amariah Soper

and a half-dozen volunteers posted away to Trull's cabin. As they went forth, came in an earlier squad, who had gone to inspect the Constable's cornfield, and their tale of how the stalks were trampled down "as the devil had threshed 'em wi' his flail" held the assembly open-mouthed till, far up the lane that led to Trull's clearing, sounded a scuffling and shouting. Half those in the yard flooded out into the market place. "They have her!" "Ah, the foul witch!" the cries swelled higher, and in the midst Soper and his men forced into the yard old Goody Mingy.

Like a lean cat she had fought them and still struggled; her scant locks fell about her shrivelled face, her toothless gums knacked together. "Oh, sweet Master Parson!" she whined. "I be na witch. I can say 'Our Father' wi'out stumbling. Hark ye!"

"Cease your mumbling!" cried Soper, and "Duck her i' the creek!" bellowed the miller's man, Nick Batter, who gripped the crone's shoulder.

Thereat Christopher Ferringham came off the well curb, and, fetching Batter a cuff that made him stagger and shouldering Soper so he spun round, swung the old woman out of their hold. "Try ducking, and you'll get a bloody pate!" he cried, in a voice that cleft the confusion.

"She's a witch!" bawled Govis.

"So was your mother," retorted Christopher, whereat Batter sneered, "Ah, you're stout, aren't you? wi' your cutting-tool at your side!"

Off flew Christopher's baldric, and his rapier went spinning into Jack Calderwood's hands. He stood forward a little before the old woman, with his thumbs tucked into his belt. "Well, I'm unarmed," he drawled. "Now come up, my bul-lies, come up!"

Every rough companion in Meadowcreek was willing to be second, but none liked the task of going up first to the man who had beaten Dearmont Killion. A jeer or two came from

the rear of the crowd, or from women who knew themselves safe, but the front rank stood silent. In the little hush the Constable, from his doorstone, asked a blunt question: "What makes ye so hot i' the matter, Kester Ferringham?"

"If you all run mad, one man must keep his wits," Christopher explained glibly. "An my uncle were here, he had counselled you so. What proof have you that you so hustle the poor old body? I see your cart, to be sure, riding on the ridgpole, but it might ha' got thither by the help of human hands."

The crowd hooted; Christopher raised his voice: "'Struth! it might be done. I'll lay you any money two active men could raise cart and all thither and fetch it down again."

"Go you and do it, Kestrel," the Constable bade. "When 'tis done, I'll believe and release the old dame. Ay, get about it, my man."

The laugh flickered in Christopher's eyes. "Very well, sir, but I must have a man to aid me. Nay, not you, Rinyon. Why, Gershom Field, who is one of the saints and defies the devil, shall do't."

This Field was an ex-musketeer of the Constable's old regiment, a rough English peasant, who, saved from death by Gleason in some forgotten Midland skirmish, had followed him overseas. To that he was a sectary of wild opinions, who once a twelvemonth quarrelled with his master on covenants of works and grace, left his service, and returned to it again. Always, whether as religionist or old Roundhead soldier, he hated aught that recalled the Papist Cavaliers; but willy-nilly he found himself coupled now to work with one.

They fetched a ladder from its shelter behind the barn—Christopher was awkward at drawing it forth, as if he had never handled such a one; they set it against the barn, and up went the Kestrel with his hands at his sides, spite of the steep angle. Gershom Field crawled after; he was a burly man and he disliked high places. "Hey, but the Roundhead durst not

follow the King's man!" jeered Christopher from the ridge-pole. After that there was naught for the hapless Gershom but to do as his comrade did and stand when he stood, though he had fain gripped the ridgepole with his knees, while below the ground was hard-seeming, and the crowd, so intent that it near forgot the witch, was unmerciful in its jeers at awkwardness.

With notable intuition Christopher saw that the cart had come up piecemeal and must go down in like manner; they slung the corn in sheaves and lowered it from the roof; they unfastened the wheels, removed tail-board and all that was removable, and set them in order to lower, and at that point the Kestrel, scrambling from the roof, slid breakneck down the ladder. "There, Master Constable, you see how to do the trick," he spoke, as he clapped into his doublet. "Now call men and finish the work."

Moses Atherton, who had been in talk with Gleason, urged that Christopher finish it himself, whereat the young fellow wheeled on him: "By what right doth any man bid me fetch and carry?" Then he elbowed a way through the thinning, half-convinced crowd to the threshold of the barn where the old woman crouched. "Come, Mother Mingy, I'll help you home," he said in a different voice.

Help her home he did, spite of the jeers of the crowd, that grew louder as he drew farther off with the beldam, and never left her till she sat in Trull's cabin. The poor furnishings were in the disarray in which the searchers had left them, and Trull and Joan, who had fled on the alarm, had not come back. "A bad son and a bad daughter they be unto me!" mumbled the old woman. "You should 'a' seen her run—the drab!—and leave her old mother! All bad, the ging o' 'em. Look to 'em, lad. There's none of 'em wishes you well. So long as your siller makes 'em to drink and your gentry shields 'em, but an once you go down they'll be first to trample on you. Look to 'em all, deary."

But Christopher forgot the gibberings of a frightened old woman, when, on reaching home, he found his aunt, who had heard the story from Jack, ready to weep over him, and Nan, with an enthusiasm he had never seen in her, came to him and caught his hands. "Oh, Christopher, 'twas gallant!" she cried, with eyes a-glisten. "The poor old creature! There's not another man in the village would dare to champion her and lay them in the wrong."

But that afternoon when he came begging her to mend a rent in his old frieze doublet, she could not but note that, though he had not worn it in a week, there were traces of fresh mire upon it. One button, too, was missing, and that same afternoon, while they sat together under the pines, she unearthed it from among the brown needles. In the middle of a sentence she paused, and her eyes travelled up the tree trunk to the long branches that swayed across Christopher's window. She questioned him abruptly: "Could not an active man swing himself from that casement and clamber by the tree to the ground without disturbing the household?"

He thrust out his lower lip in an effort to bite his short mustache; she had often noted that trick in him, and she wondered whether it were his father or Blandford Carewe who had had the habit of chewing his mustaches when perplexed. "Ay, a man could," he answered at length. "Yes, I have done it, more times than one."

"So 'twas you stole forth and yourself so ordered the Constable's cart?"

"Webb and Dearmont and I, yes."

"Then 'twas no more than you were bound to do, when you defended Nance Mingy," she sighed. "Where men must think you generous— Oh, Christie,"—that seldom used name took all the sting from the rebuke—"anything save that. Do not you prove a hypocrite."

"The Constable knew I was the one at fault," Christopher grinned.

The world at large suspected as much, but with a sinister twist thereto. Indeed, Calderwood saw fit to warn his nephew that he were best keep close at Lastbrook a time, for some of his neighbors were setting wizard to his name. He himself, who knew the young man's strength and clear-headedness, could believe mere human agencies brought down the Constable's cart and conveyed it to the ridgepole at the first, but the rest of Meadowcreek might not so easily be convinced. For once Christopher profited by a warning; he realized that in every country he had visited a charge of witchcraft would be enough to tie him to the stake or dangle him from the gallows, and he suspected the Massachusetts folk were as their contemporaries. Witchcraft was not a thing to jest about, so discreetly he drew in his head and lay quiet at the farm till the affair blew over.

The farm itself was not so quiet as its wont, for, the barley being reaped, the great harvesting of corn was now at hand. Calderwood, whom business for the Commonwealth and for himself kept summoning to Boston, had to leave the superintendence of this work to Bray Williams, and he did so the more reluctantly in that, as it was hard to get harvestmen, he had perforce hired a choice lot of scoundrels—a brace of Indians from Zimri's village, Ziba Trull, Webb Hayne, dismissed from Presgrave's service,—and, to cap all, the miller lent him Dearmont Killion. Christopher hailed with delight the advent of this rabble; at meals, to be sure, where the laborers messed at the household table, he was discretion itself, but when his friends fell to work in the crisp cornfields, he perched on the fence and exchanged banter with them, till, on the second morning, Bray Williams ordered him to go about his business, if he had any.

The worthy Bray stood in need of discipline, Christopher had already decided, when that evening Dearmont and Webb came to him with grumblings against the tyrannical overseer and vague bluster as to what they would do. "Leave him to

me," bade Christopher, with mouth puckering mirthfully. He persuaded Dearmont to transfer to a stone jug the aqua vitæ which he had fetched in a leather bottle for his sustainment, and, thus equipped, he sauntered forth in the twilight to the stable, where Bray was making all snug for the night. Three hours later Christopher stepped forth alone, and, after lingering to drink in the beauty of the still evening, crept noiselessly to his bed.

The instant he came downstairs next morning Christopher found his little stratagem had brought about unlooked-for consequences. The bay saddle-horse stood ready, but Calderwood had not set forth on the journey to Boston which he had purposed; the laborers were lounging in the house-yard, all agrin and with appreciative winks for Christopher; and in the kitchen he found his aunt nigh in tears and Nan with so anxious a face that he was dismayed. "Poor Bray hath been drunk," she drew him aside to seek his sympathy. "And Nate saith he must quit his service. Last time it chanced, two years ago, he vowed to turn him away if it befell again. Right at harvest time, too, and Nate so angry he forbade Bess and me to speak for him. And the poor fellow hath been with us so long!"

Swearing at Calderwood all the while for a Puritan without bowels, Christopher scrambled up the stairs to the back chamber where his victim lay. Williams was outstretched on his pallet, face to the wall, and answered Christopher's brusque sympathy with groans. "And I a church member and a decent man! Why did ye ever offer me that devil's brewing, Master Christopher? I canna hold liquor, and I know't most times, but wi' the weariness and all yesternight! Lord pardon me a sinner! And to go out o' the master's service at my years!" The man went so near to blubbering that Christopher cursed him into silence, and, with little swagger now, trudged down the stairs again.

The laborers were off to the field at last, and Calderwood,

just mounted, was about to ride. Dodging by Elizabeth on the doorstep, Christopher darted into the yard and caught the Magistrate's bridle. "Uncle," he cried, "'twas not Williams's fault; 'twas I made him be drunk."

"So I judged," Calderwood answered dryly.

"But plague on it! man, don't bundle him out o' service for my fault," pleaded Christopher. "He'll never be drunk again, I'll answer for't, and — and for his work, sir, till he be recovered, I — I'll do it."

"You!" Calderwood replied, with unutterable contempt. "Let go my rein, sirrah."

Christopher clenched bit and bridle firmly in his hands. "I can do't," he urged. "Call me out if I can't! At least I can hold those fellows in order. Prithee let me, uncle, and say you won't visit it on the poor fool."

A moment Calderwood hesitated, as if in his bitterness he took comfort in seeing Christopher for once humble and suppliant; then he gathered up his reins decisively: "Call yourself overseer if you like. Things can be no worse than they are."

Almost before Calderwood trotted out of sight into the woods, Christopher had on his gray breeches and oldest shirt, and, with a reaping-hook under his arm, strode away to the cornfield. He came none too soon, for Joel, the Magistrate's sober youngest servant, set in charge for lack of better, stood helpless, while the whole force sprawled in the shade at the edge of the cornfield, and Dearmont's leather bottle, replenished over night, went round. "Hey, Kester, what brings ye hither in such garnish?" Hayne raised his voice in greeting.

"I've come to work and to set you on work," Christopher made affable reply. "Up with you, boys, and let's be at it before the sun gets high."

"So ho! The uncle's been schooling ye!" jeered Dearmont. "Come have a drink, my new-starched Puritan!"

He had swung out the leather bottle, when Christopher wrenched it from his hand and flung it some thirty feet dis-

tant into the brush. "Get you up, Dearmont Killion, else I'll heave you after your bottle!" he cried, in a voice that brooked no contradiction.

Grumbling, but lower when they glanced at their new overseer, the men went about their task, though Killion flung one audible taunt: "A bufflehead that knows not to swing a reaping-hook himself is a brave fellow to set over old harvestmen."

Christopher dragged aside the well-disposed Joel, with a prayer to show him the knack of it, and in the course of the morning, what with his native strength and quickness, caught the trick sufficiently to take after dinner his due place at the head of the line of harvesters. All the long hours he led them crashing through the cornfield, where the shocks stood in lengthening rows at their backs, and always at his left came Dearmont, too mad with desire to show himself the better harvester to realize that he was doing more work than threats would have driven him to. Every muscle a-strain, Christopher fought to keep the lead of him, so earnestly that the night long he shocked corn with Dearmont at his side, and woke unrested, when the sun peered out across the cove, with the feeling that he could not bend over the reaping-hook a single minute more. Elizabeth, indeed, urged him no more than to oversee the laborers, but Christopher, limping to his task, shook his head: "That can't be done with a man's hands in his pockets." Nan did not urge him to rest, but in the mid-morning she and Deborah, the serving-wench, trudged out to the field with two jugs of beer, enough for all, which, Christopher guessed, were not offered to all, save for his presence.

He tugged through that day and the next; between coaxing and bullying he kept his men at work, and vised himself to it, also, spite of aching muscles and blistered hands, till on the fourth morning Williams, his own man again, relieved him. Straightway Christopher donned respectable clothes and had put on an aggressively do-nothing air by the time Calderwood

returned, but the Magistrate had eyes to see how the harvest had gone and to see, too, the weariness in the lines of his nephew's face. He said only, "I shall not turn Bray Williams out of service, cousin," but his tone was the friendliest he had ever used to Christopher.

The possibility that the young man might be other than a scatter-headed mischief-breeder was caught at even more eagerly by the women. With subtle change Christopher found Nan turning to him, as if she admitted at last that his manhood had capacity for other things than Latin and devilry. He was much with her in those days, for he still avoided the village, and his old comrades, transported to the end of his uncle's table below the salt, lost in attractiveness. He helped her gather the aromatic harvest of her herb-garden; he went with her to seek chestnuts in the yellowing woods; he coaxed her out with him one day when he would shoot partridges, and there, among the crisp fallen leaves, she coaxed him not to kill the poor birds, so in the end he came home empty-handed and well content. All the day long he was beside her, and when he closed his eyes at night he still saw, against the keen blue sky and amid the blazing reds and yellows of the rustling woods, her arrow-like figure and coppery brown head.

It chanced that one afternoon early in November Christopher went with Nan up into the attic to put the garnered herbs to dry. Lucy and Jack came too, but plump Lucy was soon weary, and Jack grew restless, so by the time the early shadows were filling the corners, Nan and Christopher were left alone. The light came feebly through the cobwebbed windows and the air was heavy with the pungent odor of the half-dried herbs. Nan sat among them, bunching the stiff stalks into sheaves, and now and again pausing to press them to her face. Her cheeks were daintily flushed, and her hair had come unbound so a stray lock curled loosely across her temple. Christopher, outstretched at his ease upon one elbow, watched each delicate movement of her fingers, and shifted his position

a little that he might get against the light the clear outline of her downbent brow and cheek.

"Not only the mints and the tansy we shall plant next year," her low voice that made trifles pleasant ran on; "I shall sow, too, coriander and pennyroyal. I would that rosemary grew in this soil."

"Rosemary and lavender and sweet southernwood, my grandmother grew 'em a-plenty at Ferringhurst."

She let the herbs which she held slip through her fingers and leaned back against the great chimney behind her. "It is a stately place, there at Ferringhurst? Tell me of it again, Christie, the flowers in the garden, and the pictures in the gallery, all the pretty things. I like pretty things." There came into her eyes the dancing light he liked to see, and her lips curved softly. "Do you know? the sole thing in you I found endurable the first night you came among us, was the silk lining of your doublet."

As never before he was aware of her shabby blue gown; he remembered her brown dress on Sundays, and her one hood of brown tiffany that she treasured so carefully. The poor little wench who loved pretty things and would be so pretty when she wore them! "Nan." He laid his free hand on a fold of her skirt. "Why not come back with me to England when I go in the spring?"

She flicked a long stalk of catnip across his knuckles and took up the sheaf of herbs once more.

"But I'm speaking in earnest," he urged. "You should have all the silk gowns your heart could wish. 'Tis a fair seat, Ferringhurst, fairer than I can tell. And my grandfather would be mightily pleased, and your brother too. And I want you for my wife, dear. We've been good friends, and we always would be. I know I'm a mad fellow, but I'm sober enough with you, and —"

"Don't!" cried Nan. She had shrunk back against the chimney, and the herbs, crushed under her grasp, gave out a

heavy smell. By the quick breath she drew, he feared she meant to weep, but there was laughter more than tears in her voice when she spoke. "Why did you say it, Christie?" She rose to her feet, very slender and tall to him as he sat among the herbs, and, as the light fell from the window behind her, her face was dim to see. "Why, Christopher,"—her voice was sweet and full of an impersonalness that placed him leagues from her—"I could no more marry you than marry Jack. You seem little older—"

He was on his feet now, and he caught her hand with a grasp that was almost rough. "It's no jest," he said; by the pulsing of blood through his body, the sickness tugging at his heart as he saw her slipping from him, he realized at last what poignant earnest it was. "I ask you to be my wife. What reason have you—"

"You wanted to give me a silk gown, you were sorry." Her words came steadily, but her hand quivered in his. "Oh, 'twas generous and like you, Christie. But by the next hour you'll not mean it, you—"

"As God sees me, I do mean it! Why, I love you, Nan!" he cried, but she shook her head, with face averted in the twilight, and, as he dropped her hand, turned and went from the attic. He heard the slight rustle of the drying herbs as her skirts grazed them.

CHAPTER X

WHO DANCE MUST PAY

BELOW, in her dark chamber, Nan lay outstretched upon her pallet, with her coppery brown head buried beneath the bolster. The door was thin, so a sound could travel through it; Lucy, her room-mate, might enter at any moment; the luxury of tears was not to be thought on. Yet the pity for him made the breath strangle in her throat; she had hurt him — his last outcry had betrayed it. She should not have let him speak out; she had always, inevitable though their union had seemed, checked Enoch Gleason before the decisive word was uttered. But Christopher — had she tried to check him? In the stifling dark beneath the bolster Nan felt her cheeks burn.

With an awesome delight in doing the forbidden, she let her mind dwell on what had been offered her: Sir Christopher Ferringham and Lady Anne, his wife, and the vast estate of Ferringhurst — the deer park, the lush meadows, the house with the oriel windows, all as he had set it forth to her. Clearer than these images from another's recollection came the vision of Christopher himself, so palpitant and alive that she shrank down upon her bed as from the very presence of the man. The shapely line of his close-cropped head from nape of neck to crown, the least little turn with which his eyebrows drooped to the inner edge of the eyesocket, the way he threw back his head, the way he stepped and stood and sat — every detail of him she cherished so lovingly! Nan felt the smart of tears upon her eyelids. "If he had spoke in earnest!" she whispered. The man who had defended her in the swamp, who had stooped from his place to chastise

her assailant, who had saved her from Enoch Gleason, spite of all the wrong she had done him in her thoughts of him,—her heart yearned toward him so mightily that she wanted but little of running back to the attic.

She still suffered herself to be swept away by the unchided thought, when there came to her ear a sharp rat-tat upon the door, then William's penetrating tones: "Aunt Nan! Aunt Nan! Prithee come forth. Joel hath found a litter of kittens in the stable."

With a sudden reversal of thought and emotion that left her numb, she lay an instant motionless ere she called to the boy some cheerful answer. There was a world of reasonable, everyday life of which she was a part, she remembered, and, rising from the bed, she smoothed her rumpled hair and dabbed her eyes dry. Yes, she had borne herself wisely, very wisely; to be sure, she was glad. Christopher, the most notorious rake-hell in the Bay, to be her husband, the father of her children! Nan shook her head, but at the same time murmured as if to soothe herself, "'Twas but his pride I hurt; he meant it not when he did ask me."

Yet the certainty that she had spoken a truth there did not comfort her; rather, with prompt revulsion, she felt shamed and piteously grieved when, on entering the kitchen, the first sound she caught was Christopher's voice, merry and aggressive as ever. He was kneeling in one corner of the hearth over the new-found kittens, with the small Calderwoods squatting about him and Lucy peeping over his shoulder. "This one shall be called Spot," said little Nathan, lifting one helpless ball of fur by the scruff.

"And this," cried Christopher, tossing up another, "shall be named Benjie —"

"Now, Christopher!" expostulated Lucy.

"Why, there are points of likeness. Puss hath blue round eyes of innocence; Puss doth never throw dice nor curse. The name of Benjie is very apt, is it not, Nan?"

She had flinched back into the doorway, with a sick feeling that her pity all was wasted; it was she alone who had suffered; he was too feather-headed to mean aught or to care. But when he addressed her with such swaggering defiance, when he kept up all the evening a boisterous show of their good comradeship, he overdid so far that the very exaggeration of manner revealed to her the real hurt which he had taken. She felt the surer that he had been disappointed so that the sight of her was painful to him, when next morning he announced his intention of going to Boston; it was Thursday, which was lecture day, so many folk would be stirring there.

"And you can come home this even with your uncle," Elizabeth hinted. "Prithee, do not spend the night at Master Maverick's house or on shipboard."

He promised glibly, and, kissing her good-bye, strode off. They knew what his promises were worth. "He will dice and be drunk," lamented Elizabeth. "'Tis happy if he do not fall to brawling in the street and come into the hands of the watch. And he hath been sober in his bearing for near six weeks."

"I know," Nan answered in a low voice. She had stepped to the western window, whence she could see Christopher, with hat slanting to one side, striding away across the open fields. She noted the out-flinging of his arm that meant a snap of the fingers for a black crow that was flapping leisurely to a pine tree. An instant the impulse was strong upon her to run after him, to suggest some work where she needed his help, anything to hold him safe at Lastbrook, but it was no more than an unacted impulse; she dared not do to-day what yesterday she had done without a second thought.

She turned from the casement with so heavy a sigh that Elizabeth challenged her directly: "Verily, Nan, I do believe you have said somewhat to hurt Christopher."

"I — I know not," the girl faltered.

"Indeed, it is un-Christian of you, when you have so great a power for good over him, poor lad! And now if he go to his old courses, 'tis fault of yours."

Nan clapped her open hand down upon the table. "Bess!" she cried, so sharply that Elizabeth started. "Once for all, I will not stand godmother to Christopher's vices. If he be not man enough in himself to walk upright, he may seek some other woman than me for his crutch."

With which young Mistress Calderwood swept out of the room, and left her stupefied sister-in-law to gaze at her stupefied daughter. "Oh, mother," gasped Lucy, "Christopher surely hath asked her to marry him."

"But then she must have refused him," Elizabeth spoke in a bewildered voice. That a Calderwood should decline an alliance with a Ferringham passed comprehension, yet Nan's bearing hinted at such a wonder; Elizabeth eyed her suspiciously and made up her mind to submit the ingenuous Christopher to an even more searching scrutiny on his return.

But he did not come back with Calderwood in the shallop that evening, nor did the next day bring him. Nan did a furious stent of spinning, and fairly shook small William for a fault which she most times condoned; Elizabeth ventured cheerful surmises, in which she plainly had no faith; and Calderwood, though he said, "I shall hope the best of the young man," spoke in a tone that meant he expected the worst, nor were his expectations in error.

It must have been long past the middle of the night when the Magistrate awoke with a consciousness that some one had entered the house — no unusual occurrence, for in the winter months Indians often stole in at the unbolted door to lie on the warm hearth. This intruder, however, wore shoes that clumped uncertainly through the hall and stumbled at the stairs. Just at the door of Calderwood's chamber he fell, by the noise, and swore in a voice thick but quite recognizable. "Wild-Oats is at his old pranks again!" Calderwood mut-

tered; then, when the footsteps died away and the door of the parlor chamber banged, turned over and slept once more.

In the chilly morning when he rose, he recalled what had befallen in the night, and, bent to shake off that vexation, went forth to look upon the weather. A blustering morning it was, with a scud of low cloud to westward and an ominous red in the east. Just there, in the midst of Calderwood's sky-gazing, Bray Williams, with a face of perplexity, drew up to him. "If't like ye, sir —"

"Well?"

"Please you come into the stable. I'm thinking 'tis Master Christopher hath had a hand here."

On the threshold of the stable Calderwood halted as if he had been struck. The light was not so dim but, tied carefully to a stanchion on the side where the cows were secured, he saw a horse, not his own bay saddle-horse, nor one of the heavy draught beasts, but a light-limbed gray, on which he never before had clapped eyes.

"It's the Boston mark is set here on the beast's nigh quarter," babbled Williams, "but I'm blest if I know whence or who —"

"Now on my soul, this passes patience!" Calderwood spoke slowly, as if he mastered each word. He swung about on his heel and, striding into the house, went up the stairs. William, whom he encountered on the landing, shrank back at sight of his father's face.

He flung open the door of the parlor chamber and entered the room. In the corner, on a rude perch, the hawk eyed him alertly, but Christopher himself never stirred. All dressed but his doublet, with a rug half thrown across him, he lay upon his pallet, fists clenched, head half-hidden in the bolster, and slept with the soundness and innocence of a child. Calderwood took him by the shoulder with a grip that tore open his shirt at the neck, and shook him savagely. "Christopher! Christopher!"

"Um-m!" groaned the sleeper, and screwed the back of one fist into his eyes with the same gesture that David used.

"Rouse up! Tell me: that stolen horse lodged in my stable — whose is it?"

"God knows!" drawled Christopher, and made as if to tuck his head under the bolster.

With a strength of grip that a careless observer had not guessed in his wiry frame, Calderwood dragged his nephew to his feet and flung him staggering into the centre of the chamber. "Go below stairs!" he bade, in a restrained voice that, quite as much as the grasp laid upon his shoulder, made Christopher, half smiling, stumble along before him.

A glimpse of amazed faces in the kitchen, a scared whimper from Elizabeth, "Nathan, what —" then the door banged to, and Calderwood, shoving his nephew into the house-yard, halted him alongside the well, where Harwood had just drawn two buckets of water. "Here, Peter," he spoke, in a voice that, though sharp, was no louder than its wont, "sluice me that water over this drunken rascal's head."

"I am not—" began Christopher, when his voice went spluttering out under the deluge which the zealous Harwood dashed over his head and shoulders. "Baptism for remission of sins!" the victim choked between buckets; then, after the last, straightened himself, gasping and drenched, and grinned, "On my word, sir, you must have run the rig yourself in your day, you have the remedy so pat."

Of a sudden the ridiculousness of the scene, the lack of dignity with which he had stooped to violence such as befitted Christopher himself, came over Calderwood. It was not for nothing that he had black brows and set jaws; but he thought to have mastered his temper, and this outburst left him shamed and heart-sick, and repelled by the mere sight of the fellow who had betrayed him to such an exhibition. "Get you into the house," he bade, with a struggle for his indifferent tone, and Christopher, shaking himself like a dog, walked away whistling.

Nor was there any sign of contrition in him when Calderwood presently met him at the breakfast table. His shirt was still dripping and his hair was wet. "You surely will take cold, dear," urged Elizabeth, indignation for the offence lost in anxiety at the culprit's plight.

"Nay, but I won't, aunt," Christopher vowed, and, the blessing ended, took his trencher and sat down on the settle by the fire. "I am in such disgrace with mine uncle that I dare not put my legs under the same table with him," he explained, with eyes adance. "But my head doth not ache any more, thanks to you, sir."

"Are you sobered enough to remember what befell yesternight?" Calderwood questioned icily.

"Remember? Lord save us! yes, uncle, I remember. I was at Master Maverick's yesterday. He hath a butt of sack just come in on the *William and Frances* that sailed from Malaga — well, 'tis no more than a half butt now! The master of the *William and Frances*, and the factor, and Master Maverick, and I, we went to't yestermorn and we kept at it, till they lay under the table and I was that lonely I thought to come home. So one of his men set me ashore by Pullen Point. 'Twas a strange night, sir, did ye note? All the stars were shooting stars, and red and green and yellow, and the ground heaved as there were an earthquake, and my legs went dizzy at the knees, so I sat me down under a wall. Presently some one takes me a tap on the shoulder. I look up, and there stands as neat a son of a mare as ever I set my two eyes on. 'Good even,' say I civilly, doffing my hat. 'Good even yourself, Kester Ferringham,' says he. 'Hang me but you're a tidy fellow!' say I. 'And you're the prettiest piece of a gentleman I've seen in a twelvemonth,' says he. 'Come,' say I, 'you're a gentleman o' four legs, and I'm a gentleman o' two. You do not want to stay with a Puritan sings psalms and durst not leap a gate. Let us go away together.' 'Good!' says he, and sidles me up to the wall, and I get upon his back and —"

"I asked for an explanation and you answer me with foolery," Calderwood interrupted. "Think: have you no glimmering of an idea whose horse you took?"

"Why, the horse's owner will come fast enough to seek him," comforted Christopher. "You need not vex your head —"

"If't like you, sir," ventured Bray Williams, "from what Master Christopher said of Pullen Point and all, I'm thinking the beast came from Master Winthrop's farm."

Christopher smacked down his trencher on the settle. "Bray, you're a man of wit! I'll wager that's the knave and —"

"You've spoke enough," Calderwood cut him short, and Christopher, with an amused grimace, turned his thoughts to his breakfast.

When the meal was ended and the grace said, his uncle, with mind made up, came and stood over him. "I shall write to Master Winthrop straightway," the Magistrate spoke, in the suppressed voice that Christopher knew. "You shall deliver unto him the letter and his horse, and tender him, too, a humble apology. It will rest with him, then, whether he will have you carried to Boston Jail for a thief or let you go free as you do not deserve. Now go shift into dry clothes."

Christopher delayed a long time about that task; Calderwood had set his men to work, and written to his friend Winthrop a letter of explanation that did not spare the culprit, ere his nephew reappeared in the kitchen. At the first sight of him Elizabeth paused in the reproof which she was administering to Deborah, and Lucy cried, "Why, Christopher, how brave you look!" He had donned a suit he had never before shown his kinsfolk — breeches and doublet of blue cloth, slashed and turned with silk of a lighter shade, a hue that brought out the yellow tints in his hair and the cleanly coloring of his skin. He was good to look upon, and, without smirking or affectation, he was aware of the fact, in the same calm way in which he was aware of his bodily strength.

Elizabeth fluttered over to him, retied his cravat, not without a caress of the blue doublet and the square shoulder beneath it, but Calderwood, looking on contemptuously as he folded his letter, threw in, "A pretty popinjay for such an errand!"

"I'm seeking to do honor to your friend, sir," Christopher answered in a grieved tone; then, sweeping up his plumed beaver and his gloves, clattered forth in his riding-boots to the stable, where speedily he and Calderwood were engaged in a dispassionate but lengthy argument. Christopher urged that if he walked and led the borrowed horse he would be hours in reaching Pullen Point, to the cruel protraction of Master Winthrop's searchings and anxieties; he must ride, and courtesy forbade that he ride the borrowed mount; therefore, he must have his uncle's saddle-horse. In the end, on his solemn promise to bring back the horse, and to bear himself in a seemly fashion and tender an honorable apology, he was granted his desire, and, with his uncle's scathing letter under his doublet, trotted gallantly away.

Nan watched him from the window, noted his easy seat, the skill with which he handled the two horses, and in her heart assented to her sister-in-law's declaration: "I am sure Deane Winthrop will not have the heart to deal over-harshly by him."

But Bray Williams, whom she encountered later when she ran to the stable to seek eggs, was less encouraging. "That frippery will cut a fine figure in Boston Jail, mistress," he hinted with gloomy satisfaction.

Spite of herself, as the afternoon wore on, Nan made errands to door and windows, in the more and more feverish hope of seeing Christopher return unscathed. "He should surely be here ere three of the clock," she told herself, and traced his course from landmark to landmark. But twilight came, supper was over, and still no sign of Christopher.

"I know Master Winthrop hath carried him to the jail,"

Lucy whispered Nan sorrowfully, and Elizabeth began to look reproaches at her husband.

Evening prayers were read, and the household were just bound to rest, when a spatter of hoofs in the yard sent Jack flying to the door, and upon it Christopher's voice shouted for one to look to his horse, and Christopher himself pranced into the kitchen. "Then Master Winthrop —" Elizabeth greeted him.

"A' is a hearty fellow," Christopher answered gleefully. "I stayed to eat dinner with him."

With a gesture Calderwood dismissed the servants and the children, who were loath indeed to go at such a moment; then, with Elizabeth alone for witness, turned to his nephew. "I want to hear what you said to Master Winthrop. You offered him your apologies?"

"Humbly, sir," smiled Christopher. He had pulled off his gloves and stood warming his numbed fingers at the fireplace. "'Twas this way. When I came through Romney Marsh, I lighted down in a thicket and slipped off my garter and tied it again above the knee. Did you ever try the trick, sir? If 'tis done cunningly, I defy a man to walk without limping. So I came to Master Winthrop's house, and all were by the ears about the horse and he himself in a temper. An I had been a poor shabby rogue with a hangdog bearing, I had slept in the jail and sat in the stocks o' Monday, I make no doubt. But I bespoke my master softly, how I had come from Boston unto Pullen Point, and was footing it home to Meadowcreek, and I fell into a ditch and gave my knee a shrewd wrench. And how I knew my good aunt would worry at my long tarrying, for my habits ever were punctual, so to relieve her anxiety I made bold to lay hands on the horse. And how you lent me your own horse to bring back his nag, which proves that you did countenance me."

Calderwood clenched one hand so tensely that the knuckles showed white, but his face remained impassive and he spoke no word.

"He looked somewhat sour till he noted how I limped, and — and Mistress Winthrop, she was main sorry for me, and told me raccoon's grease was good for strains, so presently we all were friendly together, and she would not suffer me ride home at once, hurt as I was, so I stayed to dinner and half the afternoon. I talked to her about you, aunt, and about Taffy. She gave me some long red apples for him" — he drew them from his pocket — "and, uncle, here's your letter thereto. I did not deliver it, for I feared we had not agreed in some trifles, and I would not have Master Winthrop to question your truth." With which Christopher took himself swiftly out of the kitchen, as if he half expected Calderwood to heave the nearest candlestick at his head.

But the Magistrate, with nice accuracy, tore the returned letter into even strips, then rose with an ungenial smile. "I will write another, come Monday," he said, as he raked up the fire for the night. "Nay, Elizabeth, it trenches now too near the Sabbath for us to speak of such worldly matters."

He could not but think on them, however. Plainly, so far as concerned Winthrop, Christopher had checkmated him. To go to the man now, to reveal to him the impudent trick that had been put upon his clemency, were to wrong him the more. Silence on that side were best; but there was no need of silence toward Sir Edward Ferringham, and it chanced that a ship bound for Bristol was lying in Boston harbor, and Calderwood already had it in mind to write letters home.

Late Monday afternoon he settled himself at the table in the parlor, and was driving his pen through accounts of his fur traders beyond Nashua and the voyage of the *Gilliflower*, when Christopher strolled into the room. His bearing was a little shy, as it sometimes was after outrageous misconduct; Calderwood remembered, too, that his sister had scarce exchanged a word with the young man these last days, and before they had always been chattering together. "Are you writing letters, sir?" Christopher asked civilly. "To England?"

"Ay."

From the other side of the table Christopher watched him an instant, then suddenly, "Sink me but if you're there I'd best be writing home too!" he cried. "To my good grandmother." Calderwood, glancing up, caught a shrewd enough twinkle in his eyes.

The household store of writing materials rested on the table. With chill civility Calderwood pushed a pen and a piece of paper toward his nephew, set the inkhorn scrupulously in the centre of the table, and continued his writing. The news of the spread of Quakerism, the threatening attitude of the Dutch, the meeting of the Commissioners of the United Colonies—all these matters he touched on swiftly with his sure pen, while at the opposite side of the table Christopher floundered in difficulties.

Though he had passed beyond the stage where a man thrusts out his tongue and breathes hard while he writes, Christopher had small claim to clerk's skill. He had scarcely taken a pen in his hand the last six months, so now the pen was unruly and required full attention. The quill sputtered; a blot of ink blackened on the paper. "Curse it!" muttered Christopher. His brows drew closer, and between them deepened a furrow. Calderwood, looking at him, stayed his pen with a sudden shock, as there flashed out from some forgotten consciousness the memory of his seldom-seen brother-in-law, the elder Christopher Ferringham. An honorable gentleman, that elder Christopher, for all he fought on the wrong side. Thinking of him and looking on his son who had so degenerated, Calderwood gave a rather more merciless portrayal of the young man, in which he pushed his quill along with real zest.

He realized presently that the laborious pen at the other side of the table had ceased to sputter, and when, at the close of his letter, he looked up, he saw his nephew had thrust aside his unfinished writing. He was sitting with elbows on the table, and an instant, while he petted his mustache with the

feather of his pen, he eyed Calderwood questioningly. "Look you, uncle," he broke out at length, "if you'll read me all the vile things you've told my grandfather of me, I'll read you what I've writ my grandmother touching you."

Calderwood hesitated a moment, then, settling himself in his chair, took up his letter and without parley read in an even voice:—

You look, no doubt, that I give you some account of Christopher Ferringham. I would the report were more gracious for me to give and you to hear. How shall that which is ill begun turn to good end? This man hath soaked in corruption till whatever virtue he may have derived from his parents is drenched out of him. Very patiently have I borne with him, the whole community indeed hath borne with him, where such vices in another had won a sharp check. Some glimmers of courage or of kindness in him have made us all to pray the evil in him might prove but the headiness of youth which yet should pass, that with patience and gentleness he might yet, by God's mercy, be won to a better course. But such virtues as are in him he doth rather prostitute to cloak his viciousness than make the aids to his well-doing. Young in years, he is old in evil, and, I fear me, beyond redemption. For his vain swearing, his light and wanton carriage, his insolent braving of authority—you doubtless have had in yourself experience of these lesser transgressions. He is besides a gamester and a tippler, a frequenter of the most abandoned fellowship in all the Bay, a consorter with bond-servants, idlers, unprofitable fowlers and the like. Perchance 'tis for the best he doth so choose his company, for he were sufficient to corrupt a township of godly young men, as we have had experience here in one notably sad occurrence. 'Tis somewhat because of his capacity to sow corruption farther that I still do harbor him. Under mine own roof I can at least lay some check upon him, and in such state I abide your decision and your summons for his return, which I pray may be not long deferred.

"That's a gallant hospitality!" Christopher struggled at bravado. "Now d'ye want to hear what I wrote of you?"

"I am not curious," Calderwood returned, and lit a candle at which to seal his letter.

"Uncle, look you," — no bravado in the voice, rather uneasy jest, — "I'll tear up my letter, an you'll tear yours."

"My time is too valuable to spend in inking paper to destroy it."

None the less, Christopher was tearing up his blotted letter, slowly, in irregular scraps. "If we stood up with rapiers," he pleaded, "I could nick you inside o' sixty seconds if I pressed my advantage. And since you can handle a pen better, and your words come, I hold that you —" The sputter of wax, as Calderwood sealed the letter, made the voice die away.

An instant later Calderwood felt a hand on his sleeve, and found that Christopher had leaned half across the table to catch his wrist. "Do you have it in mind in all conscience to send that letter?" the young man asked slowly. "Prithee do not, sir. About that flea-bitten nag of Winthrop's, I meant not — My grandfather will be angry as wildfire!"

Calderwood shook off his nephew's hand and set the last seal methodically. "Do you bear in mind, Christopher, the proverb that saith: 'They who dance must pay the piper'?"

CHAPTER XI

"THE WORLD GOES ON WHEELS"

"No, Kester Ferringham," spoke Abigail Naylor, arms decisively akimbo, "not but *you're* ever welcome to a can of beer so long as I pay license fees—or Tom Naylor pays them, which is the same, for what are man and wife but one flesh?—but I will not be pouring for all the thirsty throats in Meadowcreek, an idle ruffianage, forsooth, amongst which 'tis shame to see a gentleman unlace his reputation and —"

"Now that's my uncle you are quoting!" expostulated Christopher. "Come, Abigail, be a kind soul, and don't deny a pack of good fellows a jug of something comfortable on a raw day."

"Ay, and it is your uncle's words, master, though it's loath I am to be round with you, for I never was one—as some I could name—that be fain to give harsh words to a body, save when 'tis my bounden duty and for his profit, but he was a-saying unto me only yestermorn, 'Never another drop of drink for Christopher Ferringham till he quit you the old scot,' and I that have ever esteemed Master Calderwood —"

"Pest light on Master Calderwood!" Christopher cut her short. "In any case I can take tobacco, spite of his teeth." He dropped down on the form by the blazing fire and set to filling his pipe.

It was near mid-afternoon of a sunless day in late November, and about the corners of the alehouse sang a raw wind that made the thought of hot drink even more tantalizing. Crozier, who had settled himself on the bench in the corner

with Christopher's Horace open before him, said never a word, but Trull's sallow face was long, and Killion, swinging his legs from the table, grumbled outright: "Why in the devil's name did ye go for to quarrel with Calderwood?"

"Quarrel? Not I! My uncle hath windmills in his head—that is all," Christopher answered. "He went to Boston unto court last week, where he had a pestilence merry time bullying a brace of Quaker ranters came in on a ship called the *Goodfellow*. It should 'a' set him in a sweet temper, but it missed of it." He took up a live coal in the pipe tongs, and between puffs drawled on: "Just in the nick Shrimpton of the King's Arms saw fit to present unto him a score headed K. Ferringham—"

"How lang a score?" Rinyon Crozier's head was lifted unexpectedly from his book.

"Stick to the Latin, Dominie, and let the ciphering be," grinned Christopher. "'Twas a pound, I believe. Odd shillings and pence, perhaps. I misremember. In any case my jolly uncle files me away the score with a gloss on the margin as to what he means to say to his dearly beloved nephew. Then the same devil that afflicted Gaffer Job sent this patient man next day for a walk, and guided his steps into the alehouse of the Blue Anchor, and there on the taproom door, lo! a score headed K. F. He makes a second memorandum with gloss. Rides home at last—not angry, 'tis only bond-slaves to Satan are angry; the saints are but tossed in their spirits. Well, his spirits were tossing like a shuttlecock when he pulls up here at Abigail's house, and the devil leads him to the buttery hatch, and there— There it is!" Christopher waved his pipe toward the upper hatch of the buttery that was swung open into the common room. On the green boards of the inner side straggled a long list of chalked characters. "I have paid somewhat, though, you'll mark, for all the twopenny items are checked off. You can score out more for the money an you take the twopences first."

"But there never was day you rubbed out a penny at the head of the score but you drank on a shilling at the foot," Goodwife Naylor commented with asperity.

Christopher chuckled and stirred the fire. "I'm still free o' the poker, eh, Abigail?" he questioned, as he smote the forelog so a shower of sparks coursed up the black chimney. "We'll be warm without, my bullies, if not within. My faith! but a cup o' good sherris sack with white sugar and nutmeg atop would relish —"

"Plague worry you! hold your tongue!" growled Dearmont, and for a little space, save for the snap of the busy fire or the scrape of a heel on the sanded floor, the room was silent.

Then there sounded a quick tread upon the doorstone, the door rattled open, and as the inmates of the room turned thither, Webb Hayne strolled in among them. He cast a sharp glance about if anything drinkable were in view, sighed, and addressed his comrades: "Ship offshore."

"Aground?" Killion dismounted from the table.

Webb shook his head, back to the room and numb hands held to the fire: "Ran in and cast anchor at the harbor mouth an hour ago. Was strained i' the gale, belike, and would not beat about the Cape till all was made taut. But she's pitched on poor anchorage and —"

"Now," quoth Abigail Naylor, "an I were a man I'd take shame to myself to sit cowering over the fire like an old granam and cumbering a poor woman's house too, when there was a sight to see out-of-doors and belike every man of mettle will be upon the wharf. Shog along thither too, the pack of you, and leave me some peace, and ye need not be casting an eye toward the buttery, Webb Hayne, for it's never a drop —"

"Come away with you all ere you be deafened!" bade Christopher.

Trull clapped into Christopher's old place by the fire, but the three others came leisurely at his heels forth of the

alehouse. The barren street was deserted, and along it swept so bitter a blast that hands went speedily to pockets and shoulders were shrugged. Underfoot the ground had stiffened into hard ruts, and the fields on either side of the lane were blighted brown with frost. Before them, as the companions trudged, they could see the harbor, all atoss with waves the color of cold steel that two days of steady wind had lashed up, and far out upon the heaving water showed against the gray sky the black hull and dingy sails of the strange craft.

Killion and Hayne growled comments upon her, but Christopher, in silence, fell back to Crozier's side. "Here is your buik, Christie," the Scotchman proffered the Horace which he still held.

"Keep't," bade Christopher; his face was not merry as it had been in the alehouse. "I was reading it with one at Lastbrook. But I don't need it now. Put up, man, put up."

He knew Crozier knew it was of Nan Calderwood that he spoke, and he was ready to turn upon him if he betrayed that he knew. But Crozier went on another tack: "I'm woe that ye should be at variance with Calderwood."

"Wildfire on't!" said Christopher, between his teeth, and then, because his friend did not press him for confidence, gave it freely: "Rinyon, there's worse than the tavern scores. I've had money—ten pounds—of a man in Boston. He's frightened, now my uncle hath stopped my credit; he'll lend no more, the scurvy rogue! and he's pressing me to pay—hell burn him!"

Crozier's face turned so much graver even than he had expected, that Christopher looked away to sea and asked Hayne animated questions of the ship, till they came down upon the wharf. Already a little knot of worthy townsmen, well muffled in their cloaks, were gathered thither, among whom stood Moses Atherton and the miller Mawry. "Here cometh the Kestrel and his birds o' prey!" Christopher heard one mutter, and Atherton himself flung a bitter word of wasters

with never a groat to their pockets who bore all their bravery on their backs.

Christopher cocked his hat in their faces, and, swaggering to the end of the wharf, took his stand upon the cap-log, where they could gaze their fill at him and at his garments — the suit of tawny-colored perpetuana in which he first appeared in the village, with gilt buttons, silk linings, and the whole list of abominations. On the day, a fortnight back, when he flashed through Meadowcreek in his blue doublet and plumed hat, his neighbors had been stirred to such righteous indignation at his apparel that he had been inspired ever since to flaunt his gayest before their scandalized eyes.

But now, after the first disapproving mutter, the bystanders forgot him in speech of the unknown ship. Near a mile offshore she lay, with her yards clean outlined against the gray sky, and many a wise comment did the Meadowcreek men pass upon her. Some would have her a Dutch ship from the Man-hatoes, or a French craft from beyond Penobscot, come with hostile intent, but the most voted her of the West Indies, Salem bound. "Then there's good drink in her hold a-plenty!" Killion muttered wistfully.

"Ah, sneek up with your drink!" said Christopher. "An I were so raging thirsty, hang me but I'd jump into a canoe and paddle out thither! Dutch or French, the shipmen would make me to drink, else I've small skill in tarpaulins."

"Much you would!" sneered Dearmont. "You can't paddle a canoe with big words in such a sea."

"You'd wet your fine feathers, Kestrel," struck in young Philip Jeanison, and the grim laugh at his expense went round the wharf.

In the midst of the laughing Christopher went down the steps, where the spray from the waves that beat upon the wharf stung in his face, and began hauling in on the line of Mawry's canoe. "Will you lend it me, sir?" he cried, and with satisfaction knew one grin, at least, had faded, as he

heard Atherton warn, "Do not be aiding to that foolhardy wretch's destruction."

"Nay, sir, who's born to be hanged ne'er drowns," Mawry's hearty voice replied. "Take the canoe, Kestrel, only see to it you bring it back."

"Small fear o' that, master," scoffed Killion. "So soon as he finds the waves pulling at his paddle, he'll gladly sneak shoreward."

The words reached Christopher clearly, as he stepped into the bobbing little craft. Glancing upward, he saw how the townsmen had gathered on the wharf above him. Even the sternest faces showed a sour pleasure at the prospect of his giving over in his mad prank and slinking back before them all. With a sudden hardening of mood, he cast off the line and brought the canoe out from the lee of the wharf.

The waves tugged at the paddle, and his craft sank into a trough where the gray water reared itself between him and the sky. "Ye daft fool! Put back!" came Rinyon's voice. One swift glance Christopher shot over his shoulder, and through the spray he saw the white faces lining the wharf that would so quickly wrinkle into sneers at his defeat. Both his hands were busied, but he nodded his head gayly to them, and, keeping the canoe stem on to the waves, scudded seaward.

About him the water rose and fell, and the sky, too, heaved up and down. Now and again, as he breasted a wave, he caught a distant glimpse of the black-hulled ship, and then it went blurring out from his sight, as the canoe, with a downward plunge, sought to bury its nose in the heart of the waves. Through the thin birch he felt the vast heave of the ocean; the waves wrestled with his paddle so his arms ached and the muscles of his shoulders strained. Once a mighty sheet of water slashed by him, and he found that his legs, as he knelt, were wet, and cold water was sliding to and fro in the canoe. "That must not fall again," he told himself calmly.

The canoe mounted upon another tall wave; he could see

the gray sails of the ship and the red cross of St. George that fluttered above. The red was very red against the gray sky. Then came a second swirl of spray that blinded him, and with head bent he fought forward pantingly till through the beating of the water he heard a loud hail. The black hull of the ship that had been distant now loomed sheer above him, and he saw shaggy, bearded faces that peered over the bulwark. "A line, you fools!" he shouted, and a second later a rope stung across his drenched shoulders.

He had the canoe fast in a hand's turn, and, scrambling up the side of the ship, dropped to the main deck. "I'd take it kindly if you'd look to my canoe," he bade, as he shook his wet coat.

Some half-score seamen, big, hairy fellows in slops and loose jackets, stood gaping upon him. "What brings thee hither?" asked one, and "Wha beest thou?" another had got out, before a loud voice sounded from the quarterdeck: "Bring that fellow aft."

"What ship is this?" Christopher just breathed to the man nearest him, a tall, shock-headed knave, who without parley whispered, "The *Goodfellow* from Barbadoes."

"*Goodfellow*. 'Tis the ship brought in the Quakers and had to take 'em away. The captain is called Wotton," went through Christopher's head, and then he was striding up the three steps to the quarterdeck; the *Goodfellow* was but a small ship, and the deck was low.

On the poop was mounted a brace of nine-pounders, and between them stood a deep-chested, sunburnt man whose thick beard and rusty black hair half shadowed his face. But by his hat, cocked rakishly with a silver buckle, and by the crimson say doublet beneath his seaman's cassock, Christopher could read something of the man; so he met his scowling eyes unflinchingly and, with his most debonair manner, swept off his hat: "Captain Wotton, of the *Goodfellow*, if I mistake not?"

"'Heart! there's no mistake. I am known well enough from Bridgetown to Belle Isle," cried the other. "But in the devil's name what man are you to show your head upon my decks? Sink me but I'd change a dozen fops in gay doublets for one honest pilot in a coat of frieze!"

"You're vengeance hasty in judging a bird by the feathers," said Christopher. "And don't you miscall me 'fop' again. D'ye want to work your little ship out o' harbor? I can do't for you as well as the next man."

Wotton studied him with black eyes beneath meeting black brows: "Now burn me but you're a saucy cub! I've a fair mind to take you at your word." He strode to the companion-hatch and shouted down it, "Hola! On deck here, Master Wasket," till a second sea-dog thrust forth his head. An unprepossessing head it was, sandy-haired, scant-bearded, with a patch upon one eye, and the body that followed it up the companion-way was lank and sinewy. "We've taken aboard a skilled pilot, Stewkley," sneered the Captain. "He's to shift us to a safer berth cross the harbor. Do you take the deck and follow his orders."

With a sarcastic bow to Christopher, he drew back and leaned upon one of the guns, and for an instant Master Ferringham, with sinking heart, gazed upon the furled sails and lower at the grinning faces of the crew. Then he had braced himself for what he must do, and the tricks that current and wind played with the sands of the harbor came back to him, just as Calderwood had taught them to him on their trips in the shallop, and the old routine of Blandford Carewe's ship was clear in his mind. He weighed anchor and made sail in good seamanlike phrase, and his courage rose, as he saw the grin had left the faces of the sailors and the shock-headed boat-swain was looking on him with something like approval. "Where the devil learned ye the trick? Have ye served a shipboard ere now?" grumbled Wotton.

"Four years, sir," Christopher answered curtly, and then for

a space, while the ship stood in toward the land and came about at his word, there was no further speech.

But as they beat against the wind toward the northern side of the harbor, where was the safest mooring-ground, Wotton broke out again, in a more respectful tone, "Who in the name of the Powers might you be, my springald?"

Christopher told his name, with mind upon the ship, but out of the tail of his eye he saw Wotton come erect. "Kester Ferringham? 'Sfoot! I've heard tell of ye at Boston. That cursed long-faced Puritan Calderwood that hath sent me to sea with two Quaker jades eating off their heads in my cabin, he's your uncle, isn't he? Ay, ay, Calderwood that swings other poor rascals, while his own nephew is the most notable madcap in the Plantation."

So he grumbled on, while Christopher, with thoughts on nothing but the ship, watched sails and helm and shouted his orders confidently till he could give the last order to cast anchor. The raw wind swept along the deck so his hands and face were numb with the cold, yet he scarcely heeded in the unwonted pleasure of a place of authority. The men obeyed him; the ship obeyed him. Yonder across the harbor, grayer as the early twilight fell, lay Meadowcreek that flouted him, but it was very far distant. Then the chains rattled, the anchor splashed, the sails were furled; his little time 'of command was ended, and, as he turned to front Wotton, the cabin boy came panting with news that forced his real position on him: the canoe, unregarded, had got loose in the passage across the harbor and now drifted far astern.

Christopher swore with a fluency that finished the conquest of Wotton. "Plague on your canoe, sir!" the Captain cried. "We'll set you ashore all right and tight in the longboat, my silk-lined pilot! Why did ye ever venture in such a cockleshell in this sea? I saw you when you put forth, and wagered money you'd make no port but the sea's ground, but Stewkley Wasket would not take the odds. What set ye on to it, eh?"

"A fellow said I durst not," Christopher answered, and added, with a flash of a smile, "And then, too, I wanted to drink with you."

At that Wotton laughed outright, and fetched Christopher a clap on the shoulder that, but for the young man's having planted his feet pretty firmly, would have bowled him over on the deck. "'Slid! but you shall have your drink, all ye can down. Come you below with me, my white boy."

With frosty clatter of heavy heels on the steps, they went down into the great cabin. A mere stuffy dark hole, where the lockers stood so near the table that a man could scarce stow away his knees, it seemed to Christopher in the first change from the broader light of the quarterdeck; but when the chapped little cabin boy had lit the lantern hung from the beams above, he thought it, after all, a cosy box of a place. Through the tiny port-hole the sea showed dark and cold, but within, the lantern light made a semblance of warmth, and the rum and water that Captain Wotton speedily was brewing gave off an odorous steam. Christopher watched the process, elbows on table, chin in his fists, and meantime, that he might bear his part in the merrymaking, drawled out such joyous tales as came first to mind. The story of Deane Winthrop's horse was his favorite of his Meadowcreek experiences; he had already told it — omitting Mistress Winthrop — to his Meadowcreek comrades, and he told it now for Wotton's delectation.

The Captain laughed so his white teeth showed through his black beard. "'Swounds! thou'rt a merry devil. Refuse me but 'tis a black shame such a lad should go to waste among dull Puritans! And here be I fair yearning to hear something livelier than Stewkley Wasket's eternal dull croak." He shook his head a time over that unfair arrangement, then bethought himself, and poured Christopher a generous mugful of the hot brewing. "Show me now how deep a pull ye can take at the can."

Christopher nodded a health to his host and tossed off the

liquor. "Fill up again!" he urged, as he inverted the emptied mug upon the table. "'Swounds! but that tickled at the right spot. 'Tis a good three days since aught but table beer coursed down my gullet."

"So you're kept short among these good Puritans?" queried Wotton; he settled himself on the locker opposite Christopher, and with a lavish hand refilled the young man's mug and poured himself a draught.

"Vengeance short!" sighed Christopher, and his eyes roved wistfully about the snug cabin. Upon the main cabin opened four sleeping-cuddies; the door of one stood wide, and he could see the shelf-like bunk, the canvas slyders that hung upon the wall, the chest that was stored below—all the old trim order of seafaring life that he had known.

"Good quarters, eh?" said Wotton. "A tidy ship too."

Christopher said "Yes," and set an oath to it.

"How would ye like to sail in her?" the Captain asked softly.

Christopher set down his half-emptied mug and stared at the sunburnt man before him. He was very cool, he knew,—he could count the buttons on his host's red doublet, the joinings of the planks in the dingy partition beyond him,—yet with all his coolness he felt the blood hum in his veins, and his breath was coming quicker.

"Look now," Wotton ran on, "we've a tight ship here, six sweet lambs of guns fore and aft, a score of hard-bitted rascals to work them, and the commission of the Lord Willoughby in the Barbadoes behind us. And Jack Clinton that served as master's mate was peppered i' the head six months back off Bermoothes. You shall have his berth; I'd not bid ye into the forecastle; I'm a gentleman myself and know the stripe. You'll lodge i' the cabin, and drink when you please"—he tipped a fresh draught into Christopher's mug—"and you'll have a mate's share i' the spoil. Why the fiend will ye skulk on the shore and be schooled by the Elders and spend tuppence

for stale beer, when ye can walk in velvet and dice for pieces of eight? There's good purchase on the water-ways. This buckle here i' my hat, I had it from the belt of a Spanish Don, and there was a chest of gold below in his galleon. Come a-privateering with us, lad. 'Slife! ye'd walk your own quarterdeck ere two years were out. Come, I've taken a liking to thee."

Christopher drained a long draught of the rum and water to get an instant's time. He was master of himself, but in his head was a buzzing that made it hard to think as clearly as he wished. The Indies and battle and the merry, lawless life of old were beckoning him, yet in the haze that was like smoke of conflict floated before him Nan Calderwood's face, and there came to him, just as it had come that day in the attic, the smell of bruised herbs. "I should have a command as this afternoon. She would know me for a man," he tried to argue, but even more loudly the voice of his reason cried that privateering and pirating lay near together, and he was far from sure of the big, black man in the red doublet. He thumped down his empty mug. "No, I cannot, Captain," he shook his head. "I thank you for your love, but I cannot come with you." He said it regretfully; as he relinquished it, the privateer's life grew more attractive. "'Struth! I must pack ashore." He started to his feet. "Else I shall join with you, spite of myself."

"Sit ye down!" cried Wotton, catching his sleeve, and then the cabin door rattled open, and the one-eyed Master sprang down the steps. "In good time, Stewkley," the Captain greeted him. "Here's a blind puppy would paddle ashore to prayers ere the jug be emptied. Lend us a hand here."

The taciturn Master slid into a seat, and bare civility made Christopher sit to drink a draught with him. "Come, come, Ferringham, you shall take wine for a stirrup cup ere we let you go," spoke Wotton, and, stepping into his cabin, produced, after some fumbling and noise, a ripe-hued flask. "You'll find

twill relish better than the rum," he laughed, as he filled Christopher's mug. Wasket, too, passed up his canikin, but the Captain, with a "Humph!" shoved toward him the jug of rum.

"And after 'tis down you'll set me ashore?" said Christopher, and Wotton nodded with such willingness that he felt hurt. Out-of-doors it was dark by now, and it would be so piercingly cold that the bare thought of the homeward trip numbed him. He drained off the wine and passed up his mug to be refilled. Above him the lantern wavered so the soft shadows flickered up and down the black walls of the cabin, and the ship heaved soothingly.

"I'm cursed unhappy that I may not ship with you, Captain," Christopher said sorrowfully. "I've a liking for you, and for you, too, Master Wasket. Here's your health, and to our better fellowship! And I was telling the Captain a tale. I—" He halted perplexedly. Just what story he was telling was not clear to his remembrance. He laughed rather foolishly and, catching up the wine flask, filled Wasket's mug. "Drink it down, man, come, all at a gulp! So ho, gallantly!

" 'He who will to bed go sober
Falls like a leaf chill in October.' "

"You've a lusty voice enough," croaked Wasket, when he had downed the draught. "Come, master, can you sing *John Dory*?"

Christopher tossed the last of the wine down his throat and, banging the stout table with his earthen mug, swept into the ballad:—

" 'John Dory bought him an ambling nag,
To Paris for to ride-a—'

Sing you, too, Stewkley Wasket, strike up, sirrah, strike up!"

Two voices, at the full pitch of healthy lungs, and redoubled thwacks on the table, prolonged the uproar:—

"Run up, my boy, unto the maintop,
And look what thou canst spy-a.
Who ho! Who ho! a goodly ship I do see.
I trow it be John Dory-a." "

Unheard in the midst of the noise, the door to the little cabin opposite Christopher was flung wide. In the narrow opening stood a woman, thickset, coarse-featured, meanly clad. The slight hairy growth about her mouth, the coarse kerchief at her throat, the threadbare petticoat of fustian—these details Christopher noted hazily through the twinkling mist ere he caught her voice above the din: "Ye black-mouthed toss-pots! ye drunken blasphemers that grubble i' the dark! Will ye squander your time that should be given to the Lord in the devil's own uncleanness? Take heed—"

"Hold your tongue, ye Quaker slut!" spoke Wotton. "Is't not enough that I must bear ye away from Boston, and you with never a penny to pay the scot, but you must deafen my ears with your clack? Get ye in and lie quiet!"

"Mother, mother, come in!" begged a quavering voice in the dark of the cabin. Beyond the woman's square shoulder Christopher had a vague sight of a white little face, saw a small, chapped hand that grasped her brawny arm.

"Send out the wench to us, Goody Wheelock!" cried Was-ket, pitching to his feet. "Send her out, I say."

"Now, Stewkley," protested Christopher, gripping the table-edge as he stood, "that's not civil. Take shame to yourself, sirrah. Have ye never a sister nor a virgin aunt? And ye would not like one o' them to be drinking of rum and water, even with Captain Wotton and me."

"Worshipful company, goody," spoke Wotton, with a curious laugh. "Magistrate Calderwood's worshipful nephew."

"Kin unto that bloody persecutor?" The woman strode a step into the cabin. "God hath prepared in thee a scourge for his stiff-neckedness and his hard-heartedness, thou hare-brained fool!"

"That's not seemly neither," expostulated Christopher, in a voice that sounded to him distant. "Let us not wrangle; let's all be friendly together; we're all good fellows, eh?" The square face of the Quaker woman was clearest to him. He raised his mug toward her: "Your health, mistress, and long life and happiness and ginger hot i' the mouth!" He gulped a swallow of the wine. "Why do ye not sing up, Stewkley, ha?"

'Three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men be we,
As ever did sing in a hempen string,
Under the gallows' tree,
The gallows' — "'

The earthen mug fell limply from his hand; he heard the thud with which it struck the floor. The lantern flared before his eyes. He pressed his arm across his forehead.

"Air!" he choked. "I cannot breathe. I —"

The sea must have risen, for the floor heaved so he scarce could step; the door had melted away into distance; the faces were gone. He felt a tense arm about his body. "'M going — 'shore," he gasped, and unresisting dropped down on the locker. His arm was round the Captain's neck, his head upon the Captain's shoulder, and far in the distance he heard Wotton's hearty laugh.

CHAPTER XII

THE FREIGHTAGE OF THE "GOODFELLOW"

A FLICKER of light glinted upon Christopher's face, so he feebly sought to turn his head away. Round and round the base of his skull, like the stamp of jack-booted feet, an ache went marching to the tune of *John Dory*. "Wildfire consume it!" he groaned. Hazily through the benumbing pain he grew aware that all round him sounded a creak-creak, like the strain of a laboring ship. Yes, he was aboard ship, the *Goodfellow*, Wotton, captain, in Meadowcreek harbor, and they had been drinking. Christopher dragged one hand to his beating head.

With clatter that seemed to go through every fibre of him, a door opened in the wall before him, and broad light dazzled his aching eyes. "How do you find yourself, old lad, ha?" cried a voice he remembered.

In the doorway, fair blocking the narrow space, Christopher made out Captain Wotton, with his hat set at the old rakish angle; but he gave the seaman little heed, for over his shoulder he looked into the huddled main cabin, where lockers and rude table stood naked under the light of day. "Sure, 'tis to-morrow," Christopher faltered.

"To-morrow, eh?" laughed Wotton. "True for you, bully. You've slept nigh till the dogwatch."

Without lifting his head Christopher turned a little in the bunk where he lay, so he could eye the other squarely. "Captain," he dragged out the words, "what devil's draught did you mix with my wine? 'Have not been drunk since I was rising

fifteen. I can down my four bottles. And you did not touch the wine; you poured it not for Stewkley Wasket. You drugged it?"

"Well, what think you to do about it, brother?"

"Sleep it off," Christopher answered. "Next time, prithee give me a dose will relish better in the mouth next morning." He painfully drew the blanket up about his ears again. "I take it—the *Goodfellow* is under sail?" he questioned, with face half-hidden.

"With a spanking breeze upon the weather bow. You'll make the voyage with us, after all, my gentleman."

"As Heaven will!" Christopher answered, and, with a stolid pretence of sleep, lay quiet till Wotton banged to the door and left him.

Against the wall hung two cloaks that, as the ship rolled, swung out in a short arc above his head. Christopher counted the swing out, the flap back, while his brain beat and beat on the same thought: "My uncle can have my company—and he would rid himself of me at any price. This man Wotton wants me, and I don't want him. I want to go ho-ome!" He half-muttered the last words, in mockery of one of small David's tired lamentations, when to his dull surprise he found his voice broke in earnest.

The little cabin where the cloaks swayed ceaselessly was quite dark when at length Christopher swung his legs over the side of the bunk. There was a twitching in the back of his head and an ache in his temples, so he could scarcely sit upright, but livelier tortures still were the consuming thirst in his throat and the ill taste in his mouth. "Captain Wotton!" he spoke once, but no one stirred without. Gripping the edge of the bunk, Christopher dropped to his feet, and, pushing open the narrow door, pitched into the great cabin. The thought of the scene enacted there the night before, when he had been the sport of the older men, when the drugged liquor he still could taste was coursing down his throat, turned him

sick. He dropped down on a locker, and, casting his arms along the table, hid his face.

"Do thy head hurt thee?"

With an effort he drew himself up on one elbow. Standing over him, he made out, in the chill twilight that darkened the cabin, the figure of a woman — not the square-shouldered ranter of the night before, a slighter figure, this, and it was a softer young voice that had spoken. "Hurt me? Cursedly!" he stifled a groan.

A moment later he winced at the slight rattle with which the girl set upon the table a jug and a cup. "Thou's drink of this; 'tis honest water," she bade, and, as he gulped a draught, she poured from the jug upon a cloth and laid it to his aching forehead. "Thy head is like fire," came her pitying voice.

"That's good!" Christopher sighed. "Back o' my head too, prithee. Take heed, for there's no skull left, naught but the bare brains all open to the light, and it's like needles thrusting them. If I have any brains!" he added bitterly.

He felt the blessed sop of water on his fevered head; a little cold stream trickled between his shoulder-blades, and chill runlets were coursing down his face. "I'm much bettered," he spoke, more like himself. "You go about it handily."

"'Tis that I ha' oftentimes seen men fuddled."

"But I'm not drunk," protested Christopher. "'Sdeath! I —"

"Do not thou swear!" the girl checked him.

Christopher gasped and sat silent. What was she thowing him for? It was not seemly for a modest young wench, as she appeared, to grow so speedily familiar with a man. In his mystification he flung up his head and surveyed her. She might be sixteen years of age, a lank, flat-chested child, with dull brown hair and solemn gray eyes. Her mean garments and her broad, roughened little hands told of lowly origin, and forthwith he set her dialect to her lack of breeding. "How do they call you, child?" he asked with a shade of patronage.

"Recompense Wheelock." This without a "sir" or the customary courtesy, a brusqueness that made him, with a heightening of manner, answer, "I stand much in your debt, Mistress Wheelock," and raise her hand to his lips.

She drew back sharply, and a redness that might be for fright or surprise or anger, started to her cheeks. "Thou shouldst na mock me."

"Why, I would not mock you, poor little heart!" Christopher blurted out. "I did but thank you as I'd thank one of my kinswomen."

She still stood eying him suspiciously, when the outer door gave under a decisive thrust, and the older woman, whom he remembered dimly from last night, entered the cabin. "Are thine eyes at length set wide to thy folly?" she assailed him after the first pause of recognition. "Thou hast seen the hire of thy bestiality —"

"Mother, prithee, mother," begged Recompense, and twitched the woman's sleeve. "A' is sick and sorry —"

"Thy pains may be great, I grant thee," the elder Quakeress drowned her voice, "but look thou to it, Christopher Ferringham, that they be not greater hereafter, when thy brave coat shall na shield thee, when thou'rt called to answer for thy misspended time before a Judge to whom one man values as another." She set upon the table the bowl she carried, and in the same conscientious tone asked, "Wilt thou eat of the porridge with us?"

Christopher shook his head, and with a merciless clatter of the door the woman left him. But Recompense, ere she followed her into their sleeping-cabin, hesitated back to his side and tied the wet cloth round his head.

A little time yet he sat there in the dusk, with his head, that was eased by the water, between his hands, and harked to the heavy steps that paced the deck above him, till at last they stamped nearer, and, with a boisterous dashing open of the door, Wotton strode into the cabin. "On your feet, eh?" he

questioned, when, after lighting the lantern, he took note of Christopher. "And sore in your mind, too, I'll wager."

Whimperings and protests would divert this robustious swashbuckler mightily, Christopher reflected, so with a shaky laugh he answered: "Sore i' the head, you mean. 'Struth! I'll not be in case to drink with you again ere to-morrow night."

"That's the timber for a jolly privateersman," Wotton nodded. "You'll be tramping the deck by to-morrow sunset. Ay, I'll not thrust you into the forecandle, though 'twere easy for me to do't, and 'sblood! ye've merited it of me, Kester Ferringham. When I think on the good muscatel was spoiled by the dosing! And you tilted it into Stewkley's can ere I could wink to him. And Stewkley—" Wotton slapped his thigh and roared.

"Was he sick too?" grinned Christopher, and burst out laughing with the Captain.

"So you'll serve as master's mate and head the starboard watch," Wotton sobered himself at length. "You refused it once, but maybe you think better on it now, Master Ferringham. For there's a many men in my shoes would use ye far differently, but I love a good fellow. Come,"—he reached out his hand across the table—"there's no ill will betwixt us, eh? And for your share in what prize we make,"—he grasped Christopher's hand and his black eyes read his face—"since ye refused my offer the first time, you take no share this voyage, not till I see how you content me."

"Say we take our prize ere we divide it, sir," hinted Christopher, with a steady face, and, shaking Wotton by the hand, stumbled back into his sleeping-cuddy.

Through the night, in the waking snatches of his broken rest, he set his scattered wits to puzzle upon the wherefore of his position. Did Captain Wotton, punished in the matter of the Quakers, to no small extent by Calderwood's influence, think to avenge himself upon the Magistrate by carrying away

his nephew? "Then he knows not how my uncle doth tender me," Christopher told himself grimly. More probable, had not the practical advantage of picking up a serviceable mate who could claim no hire, appealed to the privateersman? Or was it the fact that he thus possessed himself of a lively boon-companion which influenced him?

The last of these three considerations was palpably of some force. It needed but one day on the *Goodfellow* to show Christopher that he could by dexterous management escape the brutal usage ordinarily meted out to a crimped seaman. Wotton jested loudly at his expense, but, save for that, accepted him as his officer, — indeed, used him with more friendliness than a master's mate could duly claim, and would have him into the great cabin in the evening, when the sullen Wasket stood the watch, to bear him company on equal terms at the dice or the cards. With a smiling face upon it all, Christopher rattled off his wildest nonsense and spun vast stories that made the Captain laugh; he would not deliberately play the spaniel, but he was alertly conscious of the necessity of using every decent means to keep Wotton's favor.

Wotton was his only friend, he knew, for from the start he had a foe to reckon with in the one-eyed Master. Perhaps Stewkley Wasket laid at Christopher's door the sickness which had gripped him on swallowing the drugged wine; perhaps he did not relish Wotton's boisterous praise of the new mate's companionable qualities and his accompanying sneers at the Master's sullenness; perhaps it was only that in the grain he was a surly fellow; but, in any case, he took Christopher into his hatred. He durst not lift a hand against the young man while the Captain openly favored him, but he picked flaws in everything he did, and exercised his wits to find him distasteful tasks.

The first day, even, that Christopher showed himself on deck the Master would have made him put his hands into the tar-bucket, if Wotton had **not** interfered. "That's not your mate's

work; set a sailor to do't," he rebuked Wasket, with evident delight in thwarting him, and a moment later Christopher heard him growl: "Make an end now, Stewkley. Ye would not have old Phil Thorowgood to your mate, so now ye shall e'en take the man I've been pleased to set in the office."

So the shock-headed boatswain, Thorowgood, was no favorite of Wasket's, thought Christopher; they two should be friends, then, and, with keen knowledge of what each friend valued to him now, he made advances to the man. He had soon won over Thorowgood so far that the boatswain helped him rub up his rusted knowledge of shipcraft, and on that the man grew talkative of other matters. Then it was that Christopher fell to questioning him of the Quakers; Wasket he never talked with, Wotton did but laugh at him when he showed interest in the passengers, and the women themselves he seldom encountered. But on the fourth day, when he was standing with the boatswain by the bulwark forward in the waist, he saw the elder Quakeress trudge by to the galley, and asked his companion what she went about.

"Cooking, so please you, sir," answered Thorowgood, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "The poor lunatic body hath not a groat to pay her passage out from Boston, and the Captain bade her cook the porridge for the lads, but Gog's wounds! she doth so bespice it with Scripture 'twould take a strong stomach to down it."

"Lunatic, say you?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Stark mad they all be. 'Twas a year ago one last springtide that I was at Bristol town, where these silly bodies would be a-breaking in on the Parson's discourse and rebuking their betters. The Mayor clapped them up in prison, and the prentices did pelt 'em i' the street. 'Struth! sir, ye'd see a tall man let one pluck his hat from his head and trample it into the mire, or wring him mayhap by the nose, yet he with his two hands hanging idle at his sides! Ye can see they all be distraught in their brains, so best leave 'em in peace, say I.

Ye'll never come to good, an ye wrong God's fools. Now when I came out from Bristol in the *Seaflower*, they bade us bear away three Quaker men and sell them into the Indies. Nay, not us, sir. We did set 'em ashore, e'en as Captain Wotton will do by these."

"He'll set the women ashore? Where?" The heart was jumping now within Christopher.

"Beyond the jurisdiction of the Lord Brethren," Thorowgood replied. "And well quit of 'em we'll be. Though Master Wasket, he's of another mind."

But Christopher scarcely heeded that last, for he was gazing down into the green water that slid by the side of the ship, while before his eyes swam the low farmhouse on the Meadowcreek hills. He had not dared let himself think on home since the hour when he awoke from his stupor in the sleeping-cuddy. But now when the women went ashore, he would go ashore, tramp, starve, fight his way till he came home again, back to the ordered round of life that had irked him, to the village that hated him, to the girl who had rejected him. Christopher swore softly, yet laughed as he swore: "Damme if I see why I be so set to go back, 'less 'tis that I cannot!"

Fair singing beneath his breath, he strode into the great cabin, in so joyous a mood that he longed to speak with Wotton or even with Wasket. But they were on deck, and the sole occupant of the cabin was the little Quakeress, who, on the locker beneath the port-hole, bent her head over the patching of a shabby cloak. At the sound of the opening door she looked up, and gave Christopher one of those solemn, shy glances of her gray eyes.

"What do you there?" he asked, swinging himself up astride one corner of the table. "Mending? Will ye do a stent for me?" As he spoke he surveyed himself with a rueful sort of smile. Since he turned to mate's labor, he had pulled on a pair of "slyders" over his perpetuana breeches, and Wotton had lent him a canvas cassock. It was a good fit for the burly

Captain, but Christopher's sinewy, slight body did not fill out the garment, and the sleeves had a practice of falling over his hands. He slipped off the cassock and tossed it to the girl. "You can catch up the cuffs for me, eh, sweetheart?"

"I will do it for thee," she murmured, with a sudden frightened look.

He wished the last word had not slipped off his tongue. In a vague way he felt that, for Nan's sake, he should remember that all maids were not to be used as camp baggages. With the thought of Nan came the thought of return to Meadowcreek, and he questioned, "Tell me, Recompense, do you know where the Captain meaneth to set you ashore?"

"Nay, Christopher. I know only that we are going unto Boston."

"To Boston? Now in the name of reason, wherefore? An you return thither, they'll swinge you the sounder —"

"They can but do hurt unto our bodies."

"That's no small matter. Perchance if you once were hurt —"

She smiled patiently at that. "Nay, we have not led a life of ease. There i' the home village they took from us even the bed of straw on which we lay, for that my mother would not pay tithes to maintain their steeple-houses and their false priests. Then the Light led my mother to Cambridge to bear testimony against their colleges which are like nests of unclean birds, and they did whip her at the town-cross. The lads from the colleges cast dirt and stones at me." She let fall the cassock and, stepping toward Christopher, put back the brown hair over her temple, with something of the same joyous flush, he felt, with which he showed his battle scars. "See, here is the mark where a stone struck me so I lay in a swoon. After that we are not feared for bodily hurt."

He caught her arm and drew her to him, much as he would have taken little William. "You poor little wretch!" he said under his breath. "'Slife! you're not so old as Lucy."

She broke away from him, with her face all quivering and her eyes full. "I crave your forgiveness," he stumbled. "I meant not — I wouldn't harm you, wench."

She shook her head. "I fear — I fear 'twas for vainglory I showed thee the scar," she sobbed. "I am very wicked."

Yet he did not feel inclined to laugh at the child, but, drawing a little toward her, was trying to comfort her, when a step that was lighter than Wotton's sounded in the companion-way. Even in her tears Recompense stopped breathless, with a look in her eyes that told him she was more than child. "'Tis Stewkley Wasket," she whispered, and, thrusting open the door of her cabin, hid herself within.

Christopher swung round on the table-edge and met the sullen Master's suspicious eye. "What are ye whispering here for, Ferringham?" Wasket asked sourly. "Leave that little craft in peace. I know the fame you bear."

"The girl shall take no more harm from me — than she takes from you," Christopher answered, with a narrow look at the Master. He made a slow business of drawing on his cassock in the hope that Wotton might come in, but Wasket, with a sneer at gentlemen-loiterers, packed him forth to stand his watch.

As he set foot on deck, Christopher, by good hap, spied the older Quakeress in grave discourse with the embarrassed boat-swain. Regardless of his due place, he strode to her. "Good-wife Wheelock —"

"My name is called Sarah Wheelock, friend," she interrupted.

"You may be called what you please," he spoke low to her, "only leave the saving of the crew's souls and look to the saving of your girl's body. D'ye mark me?"

"We are in God's hands," the woman answered steadily.

Christopher sucked in his breath between his teeth. "Oh, the devil take you!" he said softly, and, gripping her arm, drew her down the companion-way and thrust her into the great cabin.

All that afternoon he strained his eyes for a sight of the shore-line. With a steady head wind to fight against, the ship was beating to northward off the Isles of Shoals; not many miles westward the safe land must lie, and not only for his own sake now, but for the sake of the helpless girl, Christopher prayed they speedily might run in thither. But the night closed in and the morning broke, and still there was no sign of standing in to shore.

A sharp morning it was, with a sputter of snow in the chill water, so that Christopher, pacing the quarterdeck, furtively stamped his feet and swung his arms. Wotton, when he came thither in the forenoon watch, had a laugh at his misery, then took compassion on him. "Go below and don a coat of mine," he bade. "There's small warmth in canvas."

Below in the cabin Christopher found Recompense; Sarah Wheelock had left her alone again, and, with a promise to himself to pull a crow with the old Quakeress, he gave the girl a pleasant good morrow and stepped into Wotton's sleeping-cuddy to get the coat. He could hear the Captain's step on the deck above him and the beat of the waves against the side of the ship. Then he paused, with his hand on the coat, for a new sound reached his ear. Close by a door creaked gently, and then within the great cabin was a noise as if some one had started up.

"What a plague!" It was Wasket's deep voice. "What's amiss wi' thee, thou jade? Come, come, thou dost not voyage i' the *Goodfellow* without paying scot and lot. A kiss, come! 'Swounds! we be all thy brethren, and a brother may —"

Christopher pushed open the unlatched door and stepped into the great cabin. Against the wall opposite him crouched Recompense, with gray eyes wide, and over her bent Stewkley Wasket. "Man alive!" Christopher spoke with slow contempt. "It's naught but a child."

Wasket turned on him one shifty eye that was half hidden under its sandy brow. "Get you about your business!" he

bade; and then, in sheer bravado, it seemed, caught the girl about the neck.

Christopher remembered afterward how the thought came to him that the narrow cabin was the last place for a scuffle, and even in the thought his clenched fist rang upon Wasket's cheek. A scream from Recompense; the flash of an unsheathed knife in the Master's hand; and at that the blood leaped to Christopher's head and he went fighting mad. He swerved from the fierce stab, and, ere Wasket could swing his body back in the cumbered space, he had him about the chest, gripped his arm, and twisted the knife from his hand. He heard the blade clatter on the floor, and, with a lightning thought that 'twere best not to fling Wasket where he might recover his weapon, hurled the Master back across the table. Wasket, roaring out curses, struggled so the table creaked, but Christopher cleaved to his throat, spite of the hands tearing at his arm, and beat him over the head with his fist.

He saw only the blood-smeared face before him, heard only Recompense's screams, till somewhere a door rattled, and iron hands, closing on his arms and shoulders, dragged him off his enemy. Without, in the companion-way, he had a sight of curious-faced men and of the Quaker woman, and he heard the loud tone in which she cried out against the abominable sin of having recourse to fleshly weapons. Then he must look to himself, for Wasket, spitting the blood from his mouth, stumbled to his feet and made a dive for his knife.

Right in the nick Wotton clapped his heel upon the blade and caught the Master by the doublet front. "Quit this cabin, every Jack of you!" he shouted. "And you, you jades, get to your corner. Never woman set foot aboard ship yet but the devil's own brabblement came of it!"

When the cabin was cleared, the Captain turned upon the combatants. "You, Wasket, I bade you let that little fool alone," he growled. "'Sblood! I'll set those drabs ashore the morning, though it be in a howling wilderness. I'll not have ye clawing each other's throats."

"I'll keelhaul that fellow," Wasket spluttered through bleeding lips. "I'll have him to the grating and strip every inch of hide off his back and souse him in salt water afterward."

"Hold your tongue!" roared Wotton. "But you, Kester Ferringham, do not you think to carry it away here on my ship and break heads as you list. I'm no psalm-singing Puritan to pocket up your impudence, d'ye hear me? What are ye aboard ship but master's mate, mate to him here you've dared lift your hand against? Now sink me but I be minded to thrust ye down into the forecastle to swab decks and haul at the ropes till ye know your place!"

Christopher stepped to the cabin door. "D'ye know, sir," he asked, a bit breathless still, "I be wearied o' your forecastle? You've threatened me with it more than once already. I'm not feared of your forecastle. I'm going there now."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," cried Wotton.

"'Swounds! but I will!" Christopher raised his voice. "And when you come into the Indies buy you a monkey to buffoon for you of an evening."

Something, boot or mug, came flying for Christopher's head; he clapped to the door of the cabin behind him, and heard the planks resound under the blow.

He had either saved himself or destroyed himself with Wotton by his defiance, he reflected, as he plunged down the ladder into the forecastle; at the instant, with the joy of the fight still on him, he cared little which he had done. "Well, lads," he gave a cheerful greeting to those sailors whom he made out dimly in the stuffy forecastle, "I'm come to share with you, an ye'll have me."

Already the story of the fight had run along the deck, and Christopher found that, for the sake of Wasket, whom few loved, the most of the men received him good-naturedly, though he had to swallow some not over-palatable jests at his downfall. He joined himself unbidden to the larboard watch

and with them presented himself on deck that afternoon, in some uneasiness, for, now his anger had cooled, he began to realize how utterly he lay in the power of the man that he had beaten. But Stewkley Wasket, to his secret relief, did not show his battered face on deck. Wotton stood the watch, and, with a manner that seemed to say, "An you want fo'castle life, why, you shall have your bellyful," ordered Christopher to keep a lookout at the masthead.

All the gray afternoon Christopher held his place there, till his feet seemed nailed to the yard and there was no stir of feeling in his hands. The wind cut his face so his eyes watered and his eyelashes stiffened, but he near forgot the pain, when, just as twilight shut in, he spied to westward a dark line that must be land.

Stiffly he crept down from his perch at last, and in the dark of the forecastle deck laid hands on the big boatswain. "Thorowgood," he whispered him, "the women go ashore to-morrow, and I must go with them. Dost hear? You know Wasket. Will you help me, man?"

He got the fellow's promise,—how much it was worth he dared not ask himself,—and next morning, when the order went to lower away the longboat, he came forward with the rest of his watch. In his slyders and cassock, with a seaman's cap low on his forehead, there was some chance he might not be heeded, and Thorowgood, without calling him by name, ordered him down into the boat. Yonder, a half-mile to westward, dull where the risen sun had not yet crept, showed a thick line of trees. Christopher twisted about on the thwart to eye them, while the heart in him thumped with nervous fear lest he be recalled.

Then an instant he forgot himself, for he had glanced up to the deck and there by the gangway-ladder he spied the two women. Wotton, who stood to see their embarkation, must have proffered them money, for Sarah Wheelock's voice rose clear: "Nay, Andrew Wotton, put up thy purse. We take no

thought for the morrow; the Lord will provide. But I shall pray Him for thy kindness to give thee a new heart."

Some man laughed jeeringly, and with such God-speed the women descended and took their places forward. It was at that instant of bustle and movement when every eye was on the boat that Wotton raised a shout: "You, Kester Ferringham, come back here."

Christopher made as if he were deaf, and, before Wotton could give a second summons, Wasket stepped to the Captain's elbow. Christopher could not guess what was said, but he knew it boded no good to him when Wasket swung down the ladder and settled himself in the stern sheets. "Take the stroke oar, Ferringham," he bade straightway, and as Christopher, trying to hide his disinclination, dropped down on the aftermost thwart, sneered, "Now show these poor rogues how a gentleman can row."

Some one on the forward thwarts snickered. Christopher set his teeth and, avoiding Wasket's eye, dropped the blade into the water. The thole-pins creaked, and he fell to counting the mechanical swing and recovery of his body. The waves ran high and the boat was heavy. He felt desperately that his stroke was slackening; once the blade only flashed flat upon the water and the rowers grumbled. His forehead was wet with perspiration, and his back and sides ached with the steady strain. But yonder behind him the land was nearing, he knew, so he tugged doggedly, and, with the blood throbbing in his temples, hoped each stroke would be the last.

Yet it came to him with a shock of surprise when at length Wasket called to the men to bend to the oars, and, with a last desperate spurt, the boat went grinding up a sandy beach. Breathless, Christopher shipped his oar, and for an instant had heart only to gaze at the green water that slid in the bottom of the boat at his feet. The crew, who were to seek fresh water, leaped out upon the beach, and with them went the

women. Christopher heard Thorowgood tell them something of "Southward to Saco," and, turning in his place at the word, saw the Quakeresses trudging up the bare beach. Beyond were black pine trees that stretched away along the curve of bleak shore; the women were in the shadow of the trees, the slenderer figure turned and waved a hand to the boat, to him, and then the blackness swallowed them.

Christopher straightened himself, with breath recovered, and looked along the beach, where to northward the water whitened about black rocks. There he spied Thorowgood and a squad with the water cask heading inland, and he rose to his feet as if to bear a hand in the work.

"Sit down, curse you!" spoke Wasket. "You don't step foot ashore, Kester Ferringham."

Two men whom he knew for hang-bies of the Master remained in the longboat, and Wasket had laid a hand on the pistol in his belt. Christopher shrugged his shoulders and reseated himself. "You grew weary, eh?" the Master went on. "And your hands are sore too, maybe? You'll be sorer ere I'm done with you. Andy Wotton is near tired of you and your impudence, and now I'll have a turn." And so on.

Christopher licked his dry lips and over Wasket's shoulder studied the swell of the gray-blue sea. A tenseness was in his body as if every nerve were of wire. The sound of the feet of the returning seamen startled him so he made a convulsive movement, but he did not turn his head.

Wasket rose to his feet, and swore at the men for their long tarrying. Indeed, the tide had dropped, and the longboat now lay three-quarters on the sand. "Lay hold, all!" cried Thorowgood.

The two seamen sprang out on the sand; Wasket, in his great sea-boots, swung over the gunwale into the shallow waves. "Out with you, you lazy hound!" he bellowed at Christopher. "Have we no better work than to shove off your carcass?"

"You bade me keep my seat," drawled Christopher, and

leisurely vaulted over into the water. He felt the wash of the waves about his knees.

"Heave, ho!" came the word.

The boat swung forth into deep water. Headlong, men sprang over the gunwales. As the craft swept by Christopher, he let go his hold and cast himself to one side. He heard the waves close gurgling over his head, then, springing to his feet, he dashed the water from his eyes, and, still half-blinded, splashed to shore. A shout came from the longboat, Wasket yelled a curse at Thorowgood for falling on him. Christopher felt the sand beneath his feet, and as he stumbled forward, saw the black pines waver before him. A bullet struck the sand a little to one side. Flinging out his arms, he swept aside the underbrush and cast himself headlong into the shelter of the outermost trees.

CHAPTER XIII

JUDGMENTS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

THE snow had fallen a week before, but a snap of icebound weather held it so firm that even the high-climbing sun of early February had no power to melt it. In the one street that ran through Haverhill village the beaten white footway creaked under each step, and above in the cold sky the stars were glittering and sharp as the prickles of ice that drifted on the stinging air. But in the kitchen of the minister's house it was bright and warm enough to make the inmates remember the cold of out-of-doors with a satisfied realization of their own contrasted comfort. A mighty fire of beech logs roared and flickered on the hearth; two latten candlesticks upon the chimney-piece held each a twinkling light; and the warm air yet was savory with the hearty supper just despatched.

Master Ward, the minister, rubbed his hands and, withdrawing his well-toasted shins a little from the blaze, resumed his talk with the guest who sat by him in the chimney corner. It was young Benjamin Trescott of Meadowcreek, son of an old friend of his, who had come that day to Haverhill, where he was to deliver his maiden sermon on the next Sabbath. "From the fifth verse of the Ninth Psalm I draw my text, sir," the young man answered his host's question. "'Thou hast destroyed the wicked; Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.' An edifying text and one that holdeth much comfort for the elect!"

"Yea, a true text," Master Ward shook his head. "Even

since we planted on these shores we have seen many notable examples of God's judgments on the profane."

"There was an apt instance thereof some two months ago in Meadowcreek," began Benjie.

Over on the form in the cold corner by the outer door Rinyon Crozier, the young man's servant, lifted his head. Within his pockets his hands—one touched the corner of a small Horace—clenched rigidly; he knew what was coming, even before his master's son went on: "There was in the village a deboshed fellow whom they called the Kestrel, a nephew to Master Calderwood. One day when he was deep in his cups and they would pour him no more at the alehouse, he swore with horrid blasphemies that he would get drink from a ship lay at anchor in the harbor. He paddled out thither in a crazed canoe, spite of the warnings of some godly men, and no doubt he became there quite sottish drunk, for next day the canoe was found drifting about the harbor full of water. So he perished miserably in his iniquity—"

Crozier rose to his feet and took his cap and cloak, with such sullen clatter that the talking ceased and young Treacott turned an impatient face upon him. "I'll gang to the stable, sir, and look til the gray naig. I'm dreading his nigh foreleg is strained," the Scotchman flung a word of perfunctory respect, and strode out upon the doorstep. "If I bided there langer, I'd fetch that young skellum a chap he'd remember," he muttered. "And that would mean whipping-post for me, and a mort o' trouble for all."

He squeaked slowly down the path squared through the deep snow to the stable. The little patch of red firelight that fell from the kitchen window lay behind him; save for the dim bulk of the snow-thatched stable, the vast reaches of the white night stretched before him. Away across the untrod fields the black trees rose against the blue-black sky, and there the sheer stars shone; with his hand still upon the book that Christopher had given him, Crozier stood an

instant to gaze on them. "I winna believe him drowned," he repeated. "He went awa in the ship. He isna dead. God knows, when worser men are living —"

Still muttering his hope, he plodded on to the stable. The main entrance he did not attempt, but passed round the building by the path that led to the chicken-house, and, opening a narrow side-door, scrambled up the high sill. Within the stalls he heard a horse whicker, and he caught, too, a stirring in the cow-pen, but it was so dark that he could make out no more than the lines of stanchion and beam and of the full lofts that scowled forward above him. By feeling, no sight, he found a pile of meadow hay and, casting himself upon it, folded his cloak about him. At least, he would be angered now by none of the cruel speeches of his friend that he was powerless to resent; and in such negative comfort he sat there for long minutes, half dozed, even, till a sudden unwonted noise made him fling up his head.

Right at hand in the chicken-house sounded a flapping of wings and a faint squawk. Crozier smiled, reassured, and snuggled down again into the hay; live and let live was a good precept which he took at times from his moss-trooping father. But an idle curiosity to see what went forward made him at length step softly to the stable-door, and he came just in time to see a figure, bent warily, slip out of the chicken-house and steal down the path by the stable. Sly rogue! he was risking no chance of being tracked by his footprints in the open field, but was holding to the hard-beaten path, though it led him by the pastor's very windows. Crozier smiled at the thief's hardihood; then the smile left his face, for as the marauder came opposite the doorway, he saw it was no fellow-Christian but a blanketed savage.

An Indian prowling abroad in a border village was no smiling matter. Crozier stayed neither to call nor to question, but gave a spring from the high sill that landed him on the savage's shoulders and with the momentum toppled them

both over into the snow. A gasp of surprise came from the plunderer, then a volley of fluent curses, and with a mighty effort he tried to writhe over face upward and fist his assailant. Crozier, well bewildered, none the less held firm, with a hand clenched on either arm of the man beneath him. The blanket that covered the thief's shoulders had fallen off in the scuffle, and now when, the instant's struggle ended, Crozier paused victor, with his knee upon his prisoner's back, he noted that the bare shoulders were white. "Who are ye? What can ye say for yoursel?" he panted sternly, and then he realized that on the fellow's left forearm his fingers had gripped over the weal of a great scar.

He had the man out of the snow, with his arms about his shivering body and his face close to his. "Christie Ferringham!" he said, and the fear lest the answer be not what he looked for made his voice shake.

An instant the two men peered upon each other under the starlight; then, "Damn your soul, Rinyon! You've nigh staved in my ribs," cried the chicken-thief, and fell upon Crozier's neck.

Christopher Ferringham it was, true enough, cursing and laughing and almost sobbing with a frank hysteria that amazed Crozier. Afraid to be too gentle, he shook the young man forcefully as he dared, and, bundling the blanket about him, dragged him to his feet. "Make an end o' that!" he admonished. "You're no wean to be blubbering. Come intil the house with me, now. Elder Ward — they'll use you comfortably."

"A preacher?" Christopher got out through chattering teeth. "Strike me dead if I come! Rinyon, I—I've two women with me."

Crozier took his arm from his friend's shoulders and stood back in eloquent silence.

"Not flirt-gills. I wish to the Lord they were! I'd know how to order it then. But these be holy women, Quaker

women. And we've walked the woods for weeks, and the little one is nigh starved." He bent and, groping in the snow, picked up the dead chicken he had let fall.

"Quakers!" repeated Crozier. "'Tis forty shillings the hour to harbor one. And for the man who brings 'em into the Bay —"

"Um-m!" said Christopher, with something like a groan.

Crozier took him by the back of the neck. "You come intil the stable and hae a crack with me," he ordered; and Christopher, as if he found it pleasant that another will at last should guide his tangled affairs, came meekly whither he was bid.

In the lifeless cold of the black stable the two huddled down into the hay, lying close for warmth, while Christopher, with teeth that still chattered, poured out his story to his friend: "The captain of the ship—it was Wotton of the *Goodfellow*—he crimped me. These daft Quaker bodies—'tis an old fling-dust and her daughter—they were aboard, and he set 'em ashore on the coast to eastward beyond Saco. And I broke away from him then and got ashore too. I ran into the woods. Man, have you ever been hours alone in the white woods? I could feel the trees turn on their roots to peer after me. I had some biscuit I brought from the ship. I ate it soon; I could find no trail. One eventide I dropped down with my face in the snow, and even when I thought on — home, I could not stand up. Then I heard a voice praying. I followed the sound, and I came on Recompense and her mother. They were praying in the snow that the Lord would send them help; they were even as forspent as myself. And the little maid saw me and cried that God had sent me, and she ran to meet me. So we've journeyed together ever since. The old junt is brainsick and rails on me most times. But the little wench, why, I couldn't leave her to find the way alone. At the first we ventured into settlements — I had some canvas overgarments that I sold. But Sarah would be preach-

ing and pull the law on us. At Cape Porpoise they stoned her, and I had to draw my knife. So then we went into the woods. 'Tis happy that I ranged the country with Webb last summertide and know the Indian jargon. There were gilt buttons on my doublet that I could truck with, and then there was my shirt, and at the last I bartered my clothes for food. That's why I'm in this draughty case. For Recompense hurt her foot, and we were long on the way."

"And whither are ye bound?" questioned Rinyon.

"Sarah is for Boston; she saith she hath another testimony to bear in the town. And Recompense goes with her."

"Of a' the daft fools!" said Crozier.

"I've told Sarah that any time the last eight weeks," answered Christopher, with a laugh like himself. "And I must be a-trudging back to them now. I left them in an old barn in a meadow while I came boothaling for food. Rinyon, ye should ha' been at the tavern! I went thither to ask for bread, and one ill-conditioned clown would be free with me, for that he held me a poor tawny-skin who could not fight. I whipped off my blanket and taught him another tune. His head must be spinning yet. But I got no bread by the trade. Yet the chicken —"

"Bide a wee," Crozier checked him, and a time they sat nigh together silently in the dark. "I'll gang wi' ye to Meadowcreek," the Scotchman broke out at last. "I'll meet ye the morn beyond Andover village with a horse and stead ye as I can. Here's sixpence — all I hae. Now do ye gang to your daft folk."

They crept out again into the scuffled snow where the keen wind strangled the breath in their throats. "I'm loath to let ye go now I hae ye again," Crozier muttered suddenly; and Christopher let slip his carefully jaunty manner: "Tell me quick, Rinyon, are they all well at Lastbrook? Have they been troubled for me?"

But Crozier, well though he knew the comfort which the

young man hoped for, could not give it him. "Your uncle vowed ye had fled in the ship. Your aunt is troubled. Mistress Calderwood, she cometh each Sabbath to meeting."

"Well, I'm going home, in any case," Christopher answered, in a flat voice that strove at defiance. He tried to square his blanketed shoulders, then, as he rounded the corner of the stable and the cutting wind met him with full force, drooped his head and so plodded away through the snow.

Ten minutes later Crozier was mending the fire in the parlor where his young master was to sleep, and at the same time he was hurriedly busy about Benjie's saddle-bags. To such good purpose had he wrought that barely had he fallen asleep in his cold room above the kitchen when young Trescott, with pale face and tumbled hair, stood over him. "Wake up, Rinyon!" came his distressed voice. "I've mislaid it—my sermon."

"Eh, that's bad, sir!" drawled Crozier. He clapped into his clothes and, trudging down again to the parlor, helped the young minister to search, as painstakingly as if the missing manuscript were not at that moment buttoned within his own doublet. "I do na believe 'tis lost, Master Benjie," he suggested, when the time seemed ripe; "I'd take my oath ye left it i' your feyther's study. 'Deed, I could put my hand on the very buik ye shut it intil. Was ye na reading in Ames's *Casus Conscientiae*?"

Benjie rubbed his nose in thought, then seized desperately on this last hope. "Ay, verily 'twas so; it must be so since 'tis not here. You shall post home and fetch it, Rinyon."

Crozier grumbled; it was a long ride to Meadowcreek and the weather was bitter. Couldn't Master Benjie rewrite his discourse?

Master Benjie could do nothing of the sort; Crozier was a saucy rascal, and he knew it had taken four months to perfect that sermon. It was but Tuesday night; he had time to ride to Meadowcreek and back ere the Sabbath, and he would do it,

or Benjie would know the reason why — and there were two shillings if he'd go quietly like a good fellow, and if he would but find some other excuse for the journey to give old Master Trescott, who would be angry if he knew of his son's carelessness.

So Crozier set out for Meadowcreek, even before the dawn of next day, — a zeal which made Benjie tell his host he knew how to handle a refractory servant. The Scotchman, too, was well content; he had money for his charges on the road, six shillings in all, and a pocketful of bread and meat which he had coaxed from the serving-maid, and he was going to meet Christopher. Beyond Andover, indeed, just as they had planned it, he came up with the wayfarers — an Indian of middle stature, a sturdy, hard-visaged white woman, a slip of a young lass with gray eyes. "This is Recompense," said Christopher, from within his blanket, "and this is Sarah Wheelock. You must not call her goodwife, else she will be offended."

Crozier paid more heed to Christopher himself than to the women; in breechcloth and leggins, moccasins and blanket, he made a stalwart appearance as an Indian, but when the blanket slipped down from his head, Crozier noted that his cheeks were hollow and his eyes haggard. The man looked half-starved, more worn by his privations even than the women; and when Christopher, taking the food Crozier proffered, gave five-sixths of it to his companions, the Scotchman read the history of the last weeks and knew what self-denial had brought him to that pass. He would fain have had the young man mount upon the horse, but Christopher, swearing that he was warmer to be walking, bade Crozier keep his saddle and take Recompense up with him.

Half the day Crozier went at a footpace down the snowy road to Reading, with Recompense behind him. So little and childish did she look to him that he would have taken her on the pommel before him, but she shrank from the grip of his

arm and scrambled to the horse's crupper. There she perched, quiet as a mouse, so he near forgot her presence in worrying for Christopher, and he resented the girl who had joined to burden him in those weeks.

But later, when they had hit upon a ride-and-tie arrangement by which Crozier was plodding on foot at Recompense's side, he was touched to interest because she, too, thought of Christopher. "Thou art his friend he spoke of?" she prefaced shyly. "He is a good young man, is he not? The best man I have ever known." There was a little color now in her white cheeks and her eyes sparkled. "On board the *Goodfellow* he beat one who was rough with me," she said at length, and bit by bit through the afternoon, told further of the past days: "He carried me in his arms when my foot was hurt. He stripped off his doublet one bitter night and wrapped it about me. He hath gone hungry, oh! so many times, that we might be fed. When I would not take the food from him, he would fall to laughing and swear. So I must take it to silence him. But God will not let the words of his mouth weigh him down into the pit; thou dost not believe it?"

No, Crozier did not believe it, and, to confirm his words, he told her of some Meadowcreek passages — how Christopher had saved a certain serving-fellow from the whipping-post, and had stood his friend ever since, spite of the sneers of his neighbors. In such speech the man and the maid grew friendly together, but none the less, when they came up with their companions in the twilight, Recompense quitted the Scotchman to steal to Christopher's side.

Crozier had to push on and lie the night at Reading, but in the morning he stayed for his comrades beyond the village, and once more they rode and tied. It was a gray day, much warmer than hitherto, and the banked clouds to northward were threatening. "There'll be snaw ere four and twenty hours are out," said Rinyon; and Christopher, trudging the first mile at his saddle-bow, answered eagerly: "But we'll be

in Meadowcreek to-night. Rinyon, man, are ye sure — there at Lastbrook, there's none will look for me?"

"I've no way to ken their thoughts," Crozier replied gruffly; then, casting round his mind, dragged out one dubious comfort: "They said last December young Mistress Calderwood took til her bed."

"Heart! she must have been troubled," Christopher rejoiced, and so fell back again to Sarah Wheelock's side.

Crozier, with Recompense behind him, had pashed a musket-shot ahead down the soft woodland road, when he heard at his shoulders the small voice of his riding-companion: "Rinyon Crozier, wilt thou tell me of Nan Calderwood? Christopher hath spoke to me of her. Tell me — she is well-favored?"

"A high-spirited, proper young gentlewoman," Crozier said approvingly, "kinswoman to Christie's kinsman."

"He — he doth love her?"

"He couldna love better," Crozier answered with conviction.

After a long space of silence a carefully indifferent voice from behind Crozier faltered, "Doth she love him?"

"I do na rightly ken."

"Oh, the hussy!" This time the conviction was in Recompense's voice. "What better doth she look for, pray?"

That noon when the wayfarers halted together for a hasty dinner, Recompense made tremulous proffer to quit the horse and splash the last miles at Christopher's side, but he forbade it with a sharpness rare in him: "You would but hinder, and every moment is of value now." He did not heed her grieved lips and filling eyes, but turned to lay rapid plans with Crozier: "You'd best hide Sarah and the girl at Trull's cabin to-night. Tell him he shall have my fowling-piece, and if he refuses I'll baste his ribs for him. Then in the morning they can go by the travelled road to Boston, if they still be set to go thither."

"Whither the Light leads, there will I turn my steps," repeated Sarah Wheelock; and Crozier muttered something of heresy, and Christopher shrugged his shoulders.

Under such arrangement the travellers parted when they reached the by-way that led to Lastbrook. By then the last fleck of sunset was fading from the gray western sky and the night was closing in. "I shall be at the house by supper-time," Christopher rattled off, with high-pitched merriment. "Shall see you soon, Rinyon, and you'll be main surprised at the meeting, eh? God be with you, Sarah, since you will go your stubborn way —"

The woman broke into harsh speech: Might the Lord shine upon him and, for the good that was in him, chasten his heart so he might cast by his pride and see aright! but Recompense, who had slid from the horse, groped toward him, with hands outstretched in the dusk. He kissed her hurriedly, as if she were indeed a child. "God keep you, little sister!" he said lightly, and next instant had bent his head and plunged into the black Lastbrook road, nor did he once look back.

Then through the dusk Crozier saw Recompense shrink against the trunk of one of the pine trees that edged the road and hide her head between her arms; and he heard her sob aloud. He heard, too, Sarah's voice, raised in grave chiding, and, with a sharp exclamation, he flung his bridle to the woman and sprang down to comfort the girl.

Meantime Christopher Ferringham, with the slush splattering high as his shoulders and the ungainly blanket flapping about him, was tearing along the dark road to Lastbrook. He slipped on a bit of wet ice and sprawled his length in a puddle, but, dripping and bruised and breathless, he yet staggered on till he burst out from the woods upon Calderwood's fields. Across the open twinkled the candles of the farmhouse; they shone friendly, and, with a breathy sort of laugh, Christopher reeled toward them. The trodden ground of the house-yard pashed beneath his feet; he had pitched up the doorstone, and, with the last strength in him, he struck his fist against the door.

The door was opened; against the yellow light he saw Bray

Williams's square shoulders, heard his surly, remembered voice: "What beest thou? 'Tis an Indian, mistress."

"Nay, let the poor creature in," came Elizabeth's kindly tones.

With blanket still about his head, Christopher crossed the threshold. After his weeks in the open the heat of the kitchen made his body ache so agonizingly that he could but lean speechless against the door-frame. Through the wavering air he saw them gathered round the hearth, Elizabeth and Lucy and the little lads, and they looked on him curiously, and Taffy, in fear of the savage, cowered back against his mother's knee. Then he heard a latch click and he knew, even before he turned his dizzy head, that Nan stood in the bedroom door and looked on him. In the dread lest her face, too, show no recognition of him, he dared raise his eyes no higher than the candle that she held, and he saw it fall sputtering to the floor. "Christie! Christie!" her voice startled through the room.

The blanket went down at his feet. The hot room wheeled round him. But as the light swept out from before his eyes, he had a glimpse of her face, close to his, and felt her arms about his neck.

She was glad that he had come back! He carried the thought into his unconsciousness; it was with him when he came to himself in his own bed, where the men had laid him; and it made joyful all the week of his fighting back to his old vigor. The first time he showed himself in the kitchen, trim and shaven and Christianly-clad again, with no more than hollow cheeks and a huge appetite to recall his weeks of landlouping, he found Nan tremulously distant. She was heedful to replenish his trencher with the best, she saved for him the snug place by the fire, but she was sparing of speech and ever fluttered away from his neighborhood. Indeed, she remembered and he remembered that embrace, more than cousinly, with which his shoulders beneath his civilized shirt still quivered. By times, though, when he glanced up suddenly, he found her

eyes fixed upon him with a misty brightness that was new. "You were ill last December, they tell me," he ventured one twilight.

"I caught a cold. Be not so vain, Christie," she said, with an effort at her old tartness, but the little laugh that trailed after the words took away the smart.

He was not vain; the jauntiness with which he had returned from his former roving forsook him now. He was humbly thankful for the warmth and comfort and kindness of the ordered life into which he had grown, and humbly careful of his bearing toward Nan. The thought of her that he had clung to through the cold and the hunger of the long weeks was beggared by the sweet reality of her presence. He knew now that it was something more than the covetousness of possession that swayed him toward her, and he grew hot for shame of his earlier rude proposals. It was no more than the glance of the eye and the rare touch of the hand that he dared use, but he was wooing her, none the less, and she felt it, and with unformed phrase or answering glance fluttered nearer him and drew back. Breathless moments there were, barren of meaning to an onlooker, that made him tell himself that perhaps, when the word came from England, when he sailed for Ferringhurst in the spring, perhaps he might go as he had once made sure, with her beside him.

Then it was that Calderwood came back from Boston. He stamped across the doorstep into the kitchen one evening, and Nan sprang up from the settle, where she was eating the nuts that Christopher cracked for her, and ran to greet him. With his first firm step upon the sanded floor, Christopher, as it were a thing palpable, tangible, saw his hope with Nan die away.

Before bedtime, even, Calderwood bade him into the parlor for some private speech. Within the seldom used room the air was dead and cold, and it brought to Christopher's mind chill memories of earlier scenes that had been acted there be-

tween him and his uncle. "We held you had fled the country — the women, indeed, believed you drowned," Calderwood began in his old formal tone. "So a month ago Michael Gamlyn sought me out."

"Gamlyn? Who might he be?" Christopher made a stammering effort to face down what was coming.

Calderwood gave an impatient shrug. "You know well. A usurer by stealth, who would lend money to a foolish, headstrong youth on his bare expectations. He showed me your note of hand for ten pounds."

Christopher's fingers drummed an uneasy tattoo on the tabletop, but he faced his uncle with the old smiling effrontery: "I'm hoping you paid him, sir."

"You are past one and twenty," Calderwood took him up. "You must pay your own debts. How mean you to satisfy this man?"

"Borrow of my kindred," the answer came pat. "An they'd supplied me at the start, 'stead of doling out ha'pennies, I'd not 'a' had to give my note to any cheating knave. Did you and my good grandsire believe —"

"We were brainsick if we believed any consideration of decent gratitude would hold you from your profligate courses," Calderwood answered, in so contemptuous a voice that his nephew cried, "As you said, sir, I am past one and twenty, and I have not sought your counsel," and so flung out of the room.

Beyond the farmhouse that had seemed a haven of perfect refuge, Christopher remembered now, was a world of unpaid debts and glaring scores on taproom hatches where he was the despised Kestrel. His realization of his due place was the stronger when, the next Sabbath, he went with Calderwood to meeting; not only did Master Trescott choose in his sermon to advert to his conduct and exhort him to seize on the time which the grace of God had given him to repent of his sinful courses, but Mawry, when he came out from meeting, had a

grim sneer for him, "I spoke truth when I said ye were never born for drowning," and Master Atherton, drawing him aside, read him a scathing lecture on the shamelessness of a Christian's donning Indian garments. All Meadowcreek was against him, and even Nan, as if Puritan conscience and cold reason had come to her with her brother's return, was now neutrally friendly as the most rigid censor could wish.

So Christopher, with a defiant face, went to seek his merry old comrades; but Trull, spite of the promised fowling-piece, was sore over the risk he had been made to run in sheltering the Quakers, and his wife was so vituperative on that head that Christopher quitted their cabin and passed on to Boston. Wine still flowed at Maverick's house, shipmasters still came thither of an evening, but since the bout aboard the *Goodfellow* Christopher sickened at the mere thought of deep draughts, and the jests his comrades passed on his abstinence and on his dumpish mood maddened him.

He went on to Boston town itself, one gray drizzly morning, and two uncomfortable memories he carried away with him that night. He had seen a Quaker whipped, and though the sufferer was a lusty man, in his memory it was always Recompense whom he saw, lashed there, with torn shoulders, and the thought that something, he knew not what, might perhaps have been done to save the girl from her mother's folly, haunted him; then, as he quitted the crowd about the whipping-post, he had seen Michael Gamlyn, and his face burned when he recalled how he had fairly taken to his heels, scudded down an alley, dodged about a warehouse, like the veriest poor bully of Alsatia, to escape his creditor.

He came back to Meadowcreek, penniless and hungry and bespattered, in an evil temper to which the last touch was put at the farmhouse. The Constable Gleason, who had ridden thither to dine, had to address him before all the household: "Is it true, Kester Ferringham, that you gave your fowling-piece to Ziba Trull? I saw't in his hands, and I know

him for a pilfering rogue, so I questioned him roundly. He swore you gave it him."

"Ay, so I did," snapped Christopher. "'Twas mine to give."

He had returned to his old associates, then, in the eyes of his kinsfolk, and moreover they seemed to hold with Meadow-creek that he might have had a share in unknown evil in his weeks of absence. He himself told a carefully expurgated tale of crimping and wandering, and a lame ankle that hampered him, but Calderwood heard the story with a doubtful face, and as he believed, so believed Nan. Yet penniless as he was, sick of his old companions, Lastbrook, where all suspected him, was Christopher's only refuge.

But spring was drawing near, and with spring would come ships from England and letters from oversea. He speculated much about those letters. Surely, Sir Edward must send him money, and even if he placed it in Calderwood's hands, it would quit Gamlyn's claim and save Christopher from one anxiety. Or perhaps—and likely, too,—there would be a summons for him to return to England. He looked on Calderwood's stern face, and prayed angrily that such a summons come; and then perchance he saw Nan's eyes upon him, tender as they had been in the week of his return, and he told himself he could not go alone from Lastbrook.

Restless in his expectancy, he took to wandering out upon the pine-clad headland between Lastbrook cove and Meadow-creek village. A wide sweep of the sea stretched there before the watcher's sight, and he looked out upon the horizon for a ship, and when he spied a rare sail, made it the one that should bring with it his letters. He was half shamed of the childishness of this whim, and, telling it to none, went stealthily to his lookout. So it was that Nan had no suspicion of his lurking-place, and late one afternoon, by sheer chance, strayed in among the moist-smelling pines and came upon him.

They walked home together through the wet wood, where the swollen brook was loud and the ground was soggy with the melted snow. Some comprehension of what brought him thither made her gentler than she dared always be, and he drew closer to her in the fading light. "I may sail for home ere the month be out," he said, with a roughness unlike his debonair tone of six months back. "Will you be sorry?"

"Whether you go or stay, I am sorry for you, all times," she answered, with eyes cast down, and no more could he win from her. But at least she was beside him, and she dared not meet his eyes. It was a good omen, he read it, and he was sure of his reading when next day the looked-for letter came.

Elizabeth and the two young girls were putting the parlor to rights that morning, and Christopher, with hawk on wrist, bound on a fowling expedition, chanced to pass through the room. The casements, standing wide, let in a pleasant whiff of moist earth, and Nan had her blue sleeves rolled back from her white arms. He lingered to speak with her and to make Lucy cry out by teasing the hawk, and while he delayed, Calderwood entered with a packet in his hand.

"Letters out of England," the Magistrate said, and, seating himself at the disordered table, slowly broke the seals. "Master Trescott has just sent them on from the village. Ay, news from Ferringhurst. Go not, cousin," — as Christopher made a perfunctory movement to leave the room — "I doubt not there is a word touching you herein." Then, as he glanced at the first lines, his voice suddenly grew gentle: "Bess, it is ill news. Heaven temper it to thee!" In a lower tone he read: —

The Lord giveth and the Lord also doth take away. We all do bow unto His will. On the sixth day of the eighth month my loving consort did make a comfortable end, and now doth enjoy that peace of which her steadfast faith and meek carriage gave her good assurance. She spoke oft-times of her daughter Elizabeth and of her

graceless grandson, and she quoted many edifying passages of the Scriptures. Such another helpmeet I may never hope to possess. The Lord's will be done!

An instant in the parlor it was quite silent, till Calderwood resumed :—

Great and unexpected mercy also hath the Lord shown me, even while this stroke was falling. In the ninth month was my grandson George's wife brought to bed of a son, a lusty infant who to all seeming shall live to walk in the ways of righteousness and rejoice all our hearts. He hath been called Edward, so now, as hitherto, there shall an Edward Ferringham be master at Ferringhurst. I thank Heaven the more for this blessing since by your last letter I am come to know how unworthy a rogue is he whom I feared must be my heir. Trouble yourself no further for Christopher Ferringham. As I told him at the outset, my love depends on his deserving. Give him what surplus doth remain from the five pounds I did allow him, and let him go seek some honest labor. I maintain no debauched rioters—

"Nate!" cried Nan.

Calderwood looked up. Opposite him Christopher had flinched back to the wall. The droop of his shoulders told how heavily he leaned against it. His head was bent and his eyes were on the hawk; but though the bird had seized on his finger and was biting it so the blood dribbled from the wound, he did not draw away his hand.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MANNING OF THE KESTREL

NAN followed Christopher into the kitchen; providentially David had set up a wail which gave her pretext for hastening thither. It was evidence of the numb state to which the news had brought him that young Ferringham made no effort to comfort the child, but, back to him, stood gazing out at the window.

As soon as David, dumb with amazement that his cousin gave him no heed, was dismissed, she went up to the young man. "The hawk has torn your hand, Christie. Let me tie this rag about the place."

"Struth! so it has," he spoke janglingly. "Bit clear to the bone. A well-mettled lanneret, eh?"

"I'd liefer cosset a barn-yard hen," she made desperate effort at naturalness upon this neutral subject. "Nay, I'll believe all your tales of her rare quality. And some day you shall show me how bravely she strikes a quarry."

"Why not come forth with me to-day? Prithee, come." The hand she had bandaged closed upon her fingers with a beseeching grasp.

She flung her cloak about her and at his side stepped forth into the pashy house-yard. They went down through the fields, soft with the starting frost, past her garden, now a dreary patch of mire, and so plunged in among the trees to northward. Underfoot was the rotting litter of last year's leaves, and a raw chill came from banks of snow that blackened in hidden places. Beyond the tongue of woodland a lone

reach of marsh stretched along the seashore, and there the day through they splashed, and tramped, and sat an instant on a rock to rest ere feverishly they tramped again. Always the Kestrel talked, rattling off irrelevant tales of hawk and hound and brave sport in the home-country over which he broke into laughter that strove to be mirthful.

But when, in the waning of the afternoon, he let fly the hawk at last, she took note that he slipped its jesses. "So I've whistled her down the wind, and 'tis done with," he spoke, as the bird, sensing its liberty, flapped away into the woods. "We must trudge home too."

They made the walk in silence, save that once, in among the dark trees, he broke out, with less strain in his voice, "You never saw Lady Mary, my grandmother?"

"But once, when I was a little child. Her hair was quite white, and she gave me an orange."

"She was right kind to me," he said presently. "She always bore with me when I lay ill, only she begged me not to curse so. Poor soul! she cried over me because my hair grew like my father's." And then again: "I would to God I'd writ unto her these months!" But not a word of Sir Edward, or the little new heir, or the lost inheritance.

That evening at supper he was noisier than ever and with his loud chatter beat down all poor Elizabeth's fluttering efforts at sympathy. But when the meal ended, he slipped away to his chamber, with his face relaxing into the stricken lines of a few hours before so noticeably that Nan was not the only one to mark the change. Her heart wavered between hope and dismay when she saw her brother start toward the hall, and, with a hasty pretext to the others, she followed him. At the foot of the dark staircase she caught his sleeve, with a murmured prayer: "Oh, Nate, do be kind to him. Whatever he says, the heart in him is sick to-night."

"I shall not hurt him, child," Calderwood answered dryly, and so creaked away up the stairs.

The door of the parlor chamber stood a little ajar, and through the crack came a shaft of candlelight,—came, too, a persistent whistling of a would-be cheerful strain. Calderwood hesitated in the dark of the stairs; he had his will; his rakehell nephew had hanged himself with rope of his own spinning, yet the perfect falling out of what he had foretold brought none of the looked-for satisfaction. At the moment, indeed, he had to beat back into his brain to recall those manifold iniquities—they shrank smaller now—that had moved him to write so mercilessly to Sir Edward; instead he remembered how Christopher had reddened and stammered when he was thanked as Nan's rescuer, and he saw his blistered palms and tired face that time when he wearied himself with labor to save Bray Williams.

When at last he pushed open the door of the chamber, Calderwood spoke with more gentleness than he felt called to speak: "What are you doing, Christopher?"

The Kestrel, on his knees by his opened chest, blinked an instant into the black of the hall. "You, sir?" he asked surprisedly. "Sit you down. Doing? I am making up my mails, as you see."

"Well?" questioned Calderwood, and settled himself on one of the stools; it came over him that, save for the morning when he haled Christopher from his bed, he had never troubled to seek his nephew in his quarters.

"No doubt 'tis well for you," smiled Christopher. "I know you be glad to be quit o' me. You've harbored me some nine months, and a sore trial I've been, as you've not been backward in making me to know. Now Sir Edward Ferringham saith, 'Pack him forth!' and that jumps with your wishes, and I'll go to-morrow sunrise, sir." He wadded up a spare doublet and jammed it into a corner of the chest.

"Whither do you think to go?" Calderwood asked presently.

"To the Dutch at the Manhatoes," came hollowly, as Christopher bent, head and shoulders, into the chest.

"Flee the Plantation? You have debts—"

"Pest take my debts! Are you going to lay me by the heels for 'em now, Master Magistrate?"

"I am trying to find what rational plan you are acting upon. Pray you, answer me soberly."

Christopher took his head out of the chest and sat back on the dishevelled heap of his garments. "'Tis very simple, sir. I won't dwell among these wry-mouthed Puritans; 'twas bad enough while I had kindred and the hope of an estate; now—And I won't go back to England. It's long prayers and short commons, and I've had sufficiency of both. And I can't go upon the Continent. I've no friends there; Sir Edward hath wrought to put a close to that; all the friends I've ever had serve among the King's men. They'd give a pretty welcome, sure, to a fellow who went currying favor with his Puritan kinsman—damn him!" Unexpectedly Christopher jumped to his feet, and, going to the window, stood back to Calderwood. "I was a fool. But Blandford was slain and the rest were dead or prisoners, and I was wounded and sick, and he as good as swore I should be his heir. Man, when you've tramped and starved for months you're glad of ease—and he was my father's father. So I sold my friends for his mess of pottage. And now I've got my hire, and I'm well served." He came back to the chest, and, dropping down on its edge, began tossing in his clothes. "So I'll go to the Manhatoes and fight for the Dutch."

Calderwood reached for the candle that stood upon the table, and snuffed it methodically. "Why not stay here?"

"What do you mean?" Christopher faced him squarely, and asked the question with an utter surprise that, in the odd mood in which he was that evening, fell on the older man almost as a reproach.

"It goeth against my habit to thrust a youth of your years and temper forth to shift for himself," he answered slowly. "You can stay here a time longer. You will work. Wherever

you go now, you will have to work, and as well work here where are your kindred, as dig on some Aquidnay farmer's land, or trail a pike under a Dutch sergeant."

Christopher thrust out his lower lip in an ineffectual effort to bite his mustache, then, after a moment, slid his hand within the chest and hauled forth the uppermost pair of breeches. "I'll stay, then," he announced, as he shook them out.

"To-morrow I'll speak further with you," Calderwood professed, and had crossed the threshold when Christopher's voice stayed him.

"Uncle!" The young man had got to his feet and come to lean against the door-jamb. "Look you," he spoke humbly, "I am glad to stay, and I thank you. I've bred you naught but trouble. I'll try now— Will you not shake hands, sir?"

Next morning Calderwood gave a truce to his own affairs, while he set himself to make straight his nephew's financial tangle. With the unwonted docility that marked him in those hours, Christopher brought out his accounts—a grubby sheet or so which he kept shut up in his Testament. "I knew they'd never be disturbed there," he gave a bland explanation, on which Calderwood, bent to be patient, made no comment.

Principal and interest, some eleven pounds were due to Gamlyn, and the outstanding accounts on alehouse doors would foot up another six pounds. Christopher watched the figures, under his uncle's rapid pen, go clambering down the sheet, and his face grew long as the column itself. "What am I to do, sir?"

"Ask your creditors not to press you," Calderwood answered, and sanded his paper neatly. "Mayhap, come autumn, you'll have wherewith to pay."

Christopher wavered in new embarrassment: wouldn't his uncle pay those saucy fellows? He'd liefer be beholden to him for stay.

No, Christopher must compound with his original creditors;

perhaps it would teach him another time not to borrow so lightly. "You seem to hold that money grows by the way-side," Calderwood ended. "How have you lived all these years?"

"Blandford Carewe always gave me money while he had it," Christopher answered simply. "When he had it not, I borrowed of the next man, and when I had it I was ready to lend to whosoever sought me."

Matters were not carried thus in Massachusetts Bay, Christopher found; pay he must, and to his insolent creditors; the only respite he got was that Calderwood agreed that, ere the dreaded meeting with Gamlyn and his fellows, his nephew were best make up his mind as to what honest course of bread-winning he would follow. Christopher announced that he had already decided; he was willing to go to sea, if he could be mate of a ship, or to go into the woods to some of the trading-posts. "The safest place for you at present is in some settled, godly community," Calderwood crushed his pleasant schemes. "You'd best make your resolution to till the soil this season."

For four and twenty hours Christopher was downcast at this decision; indeed, he half packed his chest again, and sought Rinyon Crozier, who was back from his second trip to Haverhill, with questions as to the quickest way to the Manhatoes. This first excursion into Meadowcreek was galling, even as he had foreseen; already the village had news of his overthrow, and took pains, in the voices of godly women like Dorcas Pritchard or of grave men like Master Trescott, to remind him that he was dependent for food and shelter on the saintly kinsman whom in the evil of his heart he had flouted and defied in the face of them all.

So Christopher came home in a bad temper. Though he was not going to the Manhatoes, he was leaving Meadowcreek, a pest on it! At the frontiers, Rinyon had assured him, the settlers would grant land for the asking. He was going to one of the border villages, where he would take up sixty acres

or so, and, what with farming and hunting and trucking, would show the world at large the mettle he was made of. Nan, a hopeful sympathizer in all his schemes those days, found the plan good, but Calderwood shook his head: "Are you so sure to get the land? It rests with the will of the village whither you betake yourself, and most communities welcome only sober men."

Christopher was sure, so sure that Calderwood, without further dissuasion, lent him a horse for his journey and a few shillings of money, on condition that the beast be returned and the money accounted for to the last farthing. Off galloped Christopher, in the best of good spirits, and no more was heard of him for ten days. Then, on an evening of chill March rain, he rode his fagged horse into the house-yard, and himself, stiff with much riding, limped into the kitchen. He was hungry and didn't wish to talk, he said in surly fashion; there was the accounting for his money.

Calderwood opened the crumpled paper, and found therein the items:—

Bread	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1d
Beere	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2d
Feryage	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	6d
Sundries	.	.	.	.	.	.	11s	3d
								<hr/> 12s

"Is that what you call an account of your dispending, sirrah?" he questioned.

"What difference whether a penny went for bread or for beer?" Christopher said wearily. "'Tis all gone now."

"How much land have you got you thereby?" Calderwood could not refrain from asking.

"It was as you said, sir," Christopher acknowledged, nor did he ever explain his failure more fully to Calderwood. But Nan heard the whole story next day: "I took myself first to Haverhill. I was there, time I came through the woods from eastward, and 'tis a pretty site. They spoke of giving me

leave to settle, but a fellow whom I had beaten that other time in the tavern remembered me. I can't outface the sword scar on my arm. So they said they wanted among them no son of perdition who ranged the woods at odd times in heathen garments. And I told them I had no wish to dwell among a knot of starched Puritans, and so quit them and jogged away to Concord. But Concord liked not the cut of my coat nor the slant at which I cocked my hat. At Sudbury I was most discreet. I went twice to meeting on the Sabbath, and I plucked my hat soberly over my brows and pulled down the corners of my mouth. 'Struth! the selectmen spoke of giving me land. But up pops a fellow had just ridden in from Boston, and says I be nephew to Master Calderwood and a notorious gaming, tippling, profitless fellow, so they decided I was not fit to dwell among their Worships. We had words thereover, and I have recollection of bidding them all go hang themselves in their garters, and in the end I rode out o' town in haste with a constable seeking me. Very like he'll come to Meadow-creek, and there'll be another fine."

In such surprised and humbled state, Christopher was willing to listen to Calderwood's arrangements — prosaic, uninteresting, and hopelessly sensible. Since land was not to be had for the asking, in the case of a youth of besmirched reputation, Christopher must hire, and manifestly the only man in the Plantation who would rent a field to him, burdened as he was with debt, was Calderwood himself. On condition that Christopher cease gaming and drinking and give up his loose companions, his uncle was willing to let him have four acres of land, a sufficiency for the young man to handle by himself; he could pay the rental by working at odd times for Calderwood at the usual rates for an unskilled laborer, — eighteen pence a day, — and when the crops were harvested, he might hope for an increase sufficient to pay a part of his debts. Moreover, if he were indeed eager to labor, Calderwood offered to advance him five pounds or so wherewith to buy goats or swine. There was

plenty of woodland and commonage for such creatures to range over, and their flesh would fetch a good price in the West Indies.

Christopher grew alert at the prospect of live stock, and questioned intelligently as to prices. Swine were twenty shillings a head, goats eight shillings, Calderwood explained. "Then I'll buy goats and have more for the money," Christopher decided. "Eight shillings a head, and five pounds, that's —" He slid his hands under the table-edge, as he sat, and his lips moved in rapid calculation.

"Casting up on your finger-tips, eh?" Calderwood asked, with chill amusement. "Surely, you are ten years too old for such practice."

Christopher reddened as if he had been slapped in the face. "Gentlemen are not bred to figures like greasy shop-keepers."

Yet though Calderwood had shed his frigid civility for a brusque amusement that sometimes verged on pitying contempt, and Christopher had cast his jaunty surface deference for an occasional fit of sulks, the two men were nearer to a friendly understanding than during all the previous months of their intercourse. Christopher was tractable, Calderwood took pleased note, and the younger man, for his part, was well aware that in the desperate pass of his fortunes Calderwood's was the only hand that had been put forth to help him.

The Magistrate, then, found it comparatively easy to persuade Christopher to Boston, and even into the presence of his gaping creditors. Just what occurred at that meeting he never knew, but Christopher came storming to his uncle's lodgings with the announcement that he would be damned ere he pocketed up the abuse of every dirty counter-caster in that paltry Puritan village, and so banged forth of the chamber. For three days Calderwood heard nothing of him; then, as he entered the common room of the King's Arms, after a sitting of the Court, he was edified by the sight of Christopher Ferringham, snugly placed alongside of a noble stoup of sack

which he was sharing with Benoni Pritchard and a half-dozen other tipplers. "What doth this mean?" the scandalized Magistrate made demand, as soon as he had taken his nephew aside into one of the stalls.

Christopher drew a handful of papers from his pocket. "Account with Cooke of the Blue Anchor—paid in full. Account with Shrimpton of the King's Arms—paid in full. Account with Mike Gamlyn—well, 'tis but eight pounds now; I've paid three pounds thereon and silenced his tongue for a space. And here's the chinks to square matters with Nabby Naylor."

"How came you by the money?"

"Faith! sir, I sold my clothes. Packed home to Meadowcreek, borrowed Benoni and his shallop—Dorcas is still a-squealing after him on the Meadowcreek wharf, no doubt, but I fetched the garments hither. I can cheapen cast clothes with the shrewdest fripperers; I've had to sell my coat ere this. And I gained ten odd pounds—"

"Why riot away the surplus, then? Keep it by you," admonished Calderwood.

"Why, uncle, you surely wouldn't have Shrimpton think me such a niggard that I care only to pay my debts and never spend a shilling merrily?" Christopher pleaded. "Come, drink a cup with me, sir."

Calderwood did nothing of the sort; rather, he urged Pritchard thence, and Christopher must follow his boatman. By such means he came away with a pound and odd shillings still unspent, and so that evening was able to pay his scot at the Meadowcreek ordinary. It was a proud moment, when he sauntered in before Trull and Dearmont Killion, who thrust his tongue in his cheek at sight of him, and with his old swaggering gesture clanged down the coins on the table. "Where got ye the whiteboys?" Trull questioned blankly.

"Nay, I'm not so bare," grinned Christopher. "You ran forth ere the roof fell, Ziba. Fetch me a can of beer, Abigail, and no small brewing, neither."

Whereat those two penniless rogues who had made the mistake of flouting him ere his last groat went, looked so rueful that, after a hearty laugh at them, he bade Abigail give them to drink, though it was his last sixpence that paid their shot.

He trudged on to Lastbrook in high spirits, which were dashed in few hours, when he realized that his entire store was reduced to one suit of gray frieze, one leather jacket, one pair of old breeches, and a half-dozen shirts. Moreover, Calderwood had to give him good counsel: "In the long run the bulk of the garments had profited you more than the little money you have gained for your pressing needs. 'Twould take more than those few shillings to replace what you have parted with. And you must have clothing of some sort."

"Nate hath the right of it," Christopher confided to Nan. "I think one would find it merrier living with him if he did not ever so monotonously have the right of everything."

It was profitless to cry over spilt milk, so he put on the old breeches and leather jacket and went out into the wet fields to clear away brush and fell trees. From this labor he came back with his hands smarting, but Bray Williams, who had been bidden have an eye to the young man's work, had an even sorrier tale to tell Calderwood: "Master Christopher, saving your presence, sir, do swear sinful. I'm loath that that boy Joel should hark to him. And I myself be a decent church member."

Christopher, admonished on the score of his language, promised amendment readily: "Henceforth I'll say it all in French which you know not, old heart. And so your precious soul shall be saved alive."

Accordingly when the axe struck a knot in the wood, or—when ploughing time came—the share ran upon a stone, Christopher said, "*Ventrebleu!*" or perhaps, "*Quatre-vingt-dixième!*" for the one made Bray as uncomfortable as the other.

Smarting under such annoyance, old Williams set forth Master Christopher's delinquencies to Gershom Field, and

Field repeated all to Goodwife Gleason, so Meadowcreek had the whole account, and shook its head delightedly. That was the right Kestrel! He labor honestly, forsooth, who even now, after the downfall of his fortunes, would strap his baldric across his frieze doublet and swagger through the village as if he had a dozen lackeys at his heels. Now that he was a poverty-stricken cadet, the fellow's sinful pride was higher even than when he was heir to a baronetcy and eight hundred pounds the year. Meadowcreek at large girded at the Kestrel's reformation, more or less spitefully; only one man, and he the Constable Gleason, derived a ray of honest amusement from it. "You're sowing Master Calderwood's upper cornland, are you, Kester Ferringham?" he asked, when chance brought the two men together at Raham Mawry's mill. "That's a rare place for corn-thieves to prowl at harvest time."

"Let them try it!" quoth Christopher, in indignant surprise.

"Tut, tut! You'll not prove niggard to deny a man an armful of roasting-ears?" Gleason gave him back his own words to eat.

There never was a Roundhead yet that was not a churl, Christopher, with temper that lasted till evening, told the story to Nan. And Nan, with the coppery hair, replied that the Constable was her friend and Nate's friend, and no churl; then repented of her sharpness, when this poor stumbler in the path of sobriety had so much to try him, and came back to her place beside him over the account book at the kitchen table.

For the curse of accounts had overtaken the Kestrel — horrible, complicated accounts, where an hour of his labor had to be balanced against the loan of a plough. "What difference doth it make, uncle?" he had pleaded. "You are keeping a reckoning of how we stand; you thrive on such practices. And I'm willing to trust your honesty."

But Calderwood refused to be trusted, so Christopher pro-

testingly wasted ink and paper in complicated calculations. It was a relief when Nan came to his aid; she had her brother's clear wits and deft way of manipulating columns of figures. Christopher returned to his old trick of slipping his hand under the table-edge, not to reckon figures now, but to seek her left hand and hold it. They had two hands left for work, even then, he answered her protests, and that was as many as he would have had, were he doing the task by himself.

Now that there was no time for long rambling or indolent speech with her, he valued the more those minutes at night in the kitchen, and he carried abroad with him in the daylight the memory of her tones, of the vagrant touch of her hand, so that he did not feel alone. In such thought of her he was ploughing his own field, one morning in earliest April when the sky was a faded blue. It was a southern hill-slope, between the pasture and the thicket along the boundary brook, that opened out eastward to a sight of the sea and westward was stayed by the thick trees of the forest. At that end of the field stood a group of silver birches, and there was that in their tremulous erectness that so filled his mind with Nan that he held it his fancy when behind him he thought to hear her voice.

But when he turned eastward, against the light of the sun, he saw that in truth Nan was coming toward him across the loamy ground. The blue kerchief bound over her hair had slipped down about her neck, and as she drew nearer, he could see how the coppery strands upon her forehead stirred in the tender wind. "It is the bread and cheese to your dinner, Christie; you forgot it," she proffered him a tidy bundle, with a little flutter of explanation, and he ignored the explanation and said, "I'm glad you're here," with an earnestness that next instant he bridled lest he frighten her away.

He asked her to help him store away the lunch, which was a tight fit for his jacket pocket, and they made much speech of a bluebird that he showed her flitting among the slender birches,

till at last the big plough-horse, Brok, looked about to learn the wherefore of this halt. "Come, I think long to see you labor, and so doth the horse," Nan teased.

"You always do half," he hinted, and then, after she had had her mock at his laziness, she took the lines and, trying thrice ere her lips puckered aright, clucked to the horse.

Brok heaved his head forward in the straining collar, and slowly the plough cut through the caked earth. The smell of new-turned dirt was heavy and pleasant on the blue air. Christopher, silent at the ploughtail, watched the girl beside him and bore down on the handles that they might go more slowly. In the thicket of elder bushes toward the pasture a robin raised a purling note, and the sky above the silver birches that marked the limit of the furrow was unmarred by fleck of cloud.

In the shadow of the birches he swung the plough about, with a "Hai, Brok —"

"'Tis ree you mean," murmured Nan. "Christie, you are not yet a perfect farmer."

The returning furrow wavered, as he strove to walk a little nearer his companion. "I'm learning, Nan. I'm learning many things," he added after a moment, and the sudden tenderness in the understanding eyes which she raised to his made him loose his hold so the plough swerved wildly.

"What a ploughboy!" She was instantly mischievous in mock scolding. "Take the lines; I'll drive for you no more. And I must speed home to dinner."

"Nay, stay with me. We'll eat dinner together," he begged. "Come with me; I've found a rare place." He left his plough unregarded in the middle of the furrow, and, with a careful hand to help her, led her across the ridgy field where the soft loam rose about their shoes. Upon the southern edge stretched a thicket of laurel where ran an oozy footpath. The wet of the last rainfall lay upon the ground and on the slippery intertwining branches, so that when he bent down one long shoot

to show her how near the leaves were to budding, a little shower splashed them.

"And in few weeks there will Solomon's Seal grow here," Nan said, and bent to peer into the thicket. "Look, Christie, what goes there!"

Through the broken twigs and wet moss beneath the laurel a turtle was waddling anxiously, and at once Christopher pounced on him: "Hey, slow-back, come with us! You'll be there the sooner."

"Don't harm it," Nan begged, but when he offered her the creature, with its ungainly limbs asprawl and its yellow throat heaving, she gave a little gasp of fright.

Through the bushes before them sounded the chug of swift water and, as the path dipped, they came to the borders of the brook, that with spring rain was now become a considerable stream. The sun slanted through the budding trees so little specks of light wavered on the water. Christopher knelt upon the plashy margin and slipped the turtle into the brook, where he vanished with a thrusting out of clumsy flappers that made Nan laugh. "Doubtless he hath concerns of his own to busy him," she said, and then, losing the dainty balance that she was maintaining on a slippery stone, was fain to clutch at Christopher's shoulder.

"I would I might catch another turtle," he smiled up at her.

"How old are you, Christie?"

"Five," he answered. "That doth make you four. And my faith! we have been making dirt pies together." He splashed his grimy hands in the brook.

"Your forehead is dirty too, child. No, you did not touch the place. Dip my handkerchief in the water and give it me." She drew the wet cloth across his forehead and pushed by the rumpled forelock, and an instant, when she let her hand drop to his shoulder, they still gazed into each other's eyes.

He rose to his feet at length, and, taking her hand, led the

way a little up into the bushes, where the sun poured down unchecked on a bare ledge of rock. "We'll eat here," he said, and cast himself down at her feet.

They spoke of the fair place that it was, shut in so by the trees; and they spoke of the good spring weather that had come; and gravely even of the bread and cheese they ate; and each knew so well that these were not the things they had come thither to say that at the last they grew silent. A light wind stirred the sun-tipped branches about them. A chipmunk scurried across the open space below the rock. Of a sudden Christopher drew himself a little nearer the girl. "Nan," he spoke, very softly. "That time when I was on the *Goodfellow* I should 'a' gone a-privateering with Wotton, an it were not for you." He did not look up at her, but he sought and found her hand and held it close. "And a month ago I had been off to the Manhatoes, were it not for you. I've less than nothing, and I've the hatred of nigh every man in the Plantation to boot. But — but I need you, dear."

In the bushes below them he could hear the faint stir of the brook, and the sunlight upon the bare rock dazzled before his eyes. Then he felt the girl's hand brush across his hair, and he bowed his head against her knee.

It might have been minutes or hours later that a distant halloo brought them both to their feet. "It is not Jack's voice," Nan murmured, and, drawing a little apart, they crept out into the open field. There, at the verge of the thicket, Calderwood himself sat his bay saddle-horse.

"The field will scarce be ploughed at this rate," he greeted them in an unchanged tone; then as Christopher turned guiltily to his work, bade: "Jump up behind me, Anne. I'll bear you home."

She was glad that he could not see her face. Like a detected culprit she snuggled down behind his shoulders and said no word, till he questioned abruptly, "What were you and Christopher Ferringham doing in the wood?"

"We — we went thither to eat our dinner," Nan faltered in a meek voice.

A half-hour later Calderwood, maturely deliberating, called his wife aside. "Bess," he spoke, with the triumph of discovery, "that young fool our nephew hath had the impudence to pay court to my sister."

"Why, Nathan, he was doing that five months ago," Elizabeth rejoined placidly. "Only now she doth love him as much as he loves her. Indeed, 'tis a match after mine own heart."

Whereat the Magistrate opened his mouth, then shut it again, and spoke no further word on that head for full four and twenty hours. Then, with his wonted finality, he announced that Nan was to go next week to spend the summer with her sister Desborough at New Haven.

"You don't want to go and he shan't make you!" Christopher stormed, and headlong sought Calderwood, with protests that shattered like glass against the hard wall of the older man's logic. "What can you offer a woman save a share in your debts and your ill repute? Go to! I was coming to think better of you."

Nor were Nan's later pleadings of more avail. "He is living soberly now," she urged.

"Ay, he hath played at the new game of sobriety for four weeks," her brother answered. "Let him hold to it for a year, ere he hope for reward."

"And — and he needs me now," she dropped her voice to a whisper.

"He must learn to rely on God and his own strength, without a woman's aid," Calderwood voiced another merciless truth. "There must be no troth plighted between you, remember. You go hence free. When you return — well, well, then if Wild-Oats is still in love with steady courses, 'twill be time to talk."

Of that grudging little hope Nan made a joyous certainty, so she wiped her eyes and fashioned herself a new gown against

the long journey. The Kestrel, too, plucked up his spirits. After all, six months were but six months. He was scrupulous to speak no word of love or marriage, — so far he kept the letter of the injunction which Calderwood had laid on him, — but he offered Nan once more the ivory-handled knife, and this time she took it, and between them they knew well the slight gift was a pledge. Of an evening when they labored at accounts, they calculated the increase from the field and from the flocks and quitted Gamlyn's claim and had a surplus left. Moreover, Christopher spoke in a careful third person of the lands to eastward by Saco where settlers were welcome, and Nan, though loath to leave Meadowcreek, thought that under circumstances a woman might be willing to go thither.

But the last evening came, when the accounts they tried to follow were neglected, and he gripped her hand fast beneath the table-edge; and pitiless, too, came in the next gray morning. Nan was to go in the shallop with Calderwood to Boston, and, as the wind and tide favored, they called her early from her bed. Christopher rose too and sat by her while she ate her scant breakfast under the dim candlelight of the kitchen. Elizabeth, loosely gowned, roved to and fro, and Calderwood was wrapping himself in his cloak and chiding Peter sternly for the condition in which he found the lantern. There was little chance for all Christopher longed to say; rather, he jested, hardily and flippantly, and Nan, with the tears welling to her eyes, tried to smile back.

At last the house-door closed behind them, and they two were alone in the outer dusk. Through the gray mist that thickened across the fields to shoreward the lantern bobbed away, with its little light showing no more than the legs of the men who tramped by it. The deadness of the hour before sunrise was in the air. Christopher drew Nan's cloak closer round her, and let his arm rest about her waist.

So they went down across the field, where the wet fog-damp lay at their feet, till the hollow beat of the waves sounded

near, and then through the dimness showed the whitening beach that stretched before them. On the gray sand they could see the dark canoe and the dark figures of the men that waited by it. Nan's hand rested on the front of Christopher's doublet, and, ten paces from the men, they halted. "I must go," she whispered in a voice that quavered. "Remember, Christie, whether we be happy — together — when we meet again, rests with you. I shall pray. But you — you will take heed, even as I stood at your side, oh! you will bear yourself well?"

He took her face between his hands and kissed her. "Have no fear, dear heart. When you see me next you shall be proud of me."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE OUTER DARK

CHRISTOPHER sat astride the bench beneath the cobwebbed attic window, with his limp book of the Iliads flattened open before him. Since Nan went away, a week before, he had had desperate recourse to study of the haphazard sort that served him, and, with a half humorous, rueful sense that it was appropriate to his state of mind, he delved now at the parting of Hector and Andromache. But he followed the crabbed text at a snail's pace, for, as the sunlight faded from the western window, the dusking attic grew remindful of the beloved girl. The stir of the herbs, bunched from the black rafters, made him start as at the rustle of her garments, and the dim corner by the chimney drew his eyes as if she still nestled there.

He had a jarring sense of readjusting himself to actuality when the door banged open and Jack appeared on the threshold. "Here i' the dusk, Christopher? I've tidings; guess what."

"Take me with you," answered Christopher, and slapped to the Iliad with a businesslike, loud noise.

"That ship in the offing this morn, 'twas the *Gilliflower*, in truth. She hath come into port. I've been upon the wharf all day. Three days out from Barbadoes they gave a brush to buccaneers. You should hear Captain Gleason speak thereof."

"Let him alone for speaking," chuckled Christopher, but the boy ran on: "That's the life for a man of mettle, eh, cousin? Faith! I'll never be a miching preacher like Lucy's

Benjie. Next voyage I'll sail cabin boy in the *Gilliflower*, mark it well."

"You'll find your father hath a word to say to that, my bawcock," answered Christopher; and, loud in talk, they trudged below to supper.

At table there was much speech of the *Gilliflower*, of her profitable voyage, and the excellent carriage of her captain. "'Tis well that opportunity was given him to redeem himself," Calderwood addressed his wife. "Enoch seems truly chastened, even as we have prayed. I doubt not he will gain readmittance unto the church."

Christopher added no word to his uncle's commendations; even though he had now no fear of Enoch Gleason as a rival, his old aversion to the personality of the man remained. When he came upon the Captain a day or two later in the village, he was exasperated by the sound of the fellow's hearty voice, by his very garments. Since the brush with the searovers Enoch affected a buff jacket of vivid yellow, lined with a peculiar shade of red,—a combination of colors that harrowed young Ferringham. Nor did it soothe his feelings when, as he sauntered by the Constable's gate, where Enoch stood in speech with Philip Jeanison, he heard the Captain sneer, "Of a truth, the Kestrel hath moulted his gay plumes."

The taunt was in his mind next morning when, just the hither side of the alehouse, he met Enoch face to face. Christopher had the inner side of the way and kept it steadily; Enoch did the like; and, neither swerving, they came together with a breathless impact. In the moment of collision Christopher, though the slighter of the two, contrived by a dexterous use of shoulder and elbow to land Enoch in the kennel. "The gentler blood takes the wall of the baser, goodman," he drawled; he knew the truth that lurked in the gibe would make it bite deep.

After that triumphant encounter he gave little heed to Captain Enoch; he was a sober planter in those days and had

other matter to busy him. There was the ploughing and the sowing of the cornfields to take his thoughts, and when those labors were over, he turned his attention to his flock of goats. Yonder in Malden dwelt a man who would sell to him, he learned after a week of inquiries, so at last he claimed of Calderwood the promised five pounds. By preference he took it in coin — rylls of eight, rix dollars, and the new minted North-Easters with the pine tree stamped upon them; spite of his months in Massachusetts he kept still a Continental dislike for country-pay.

With pockets full of money, then, and a headful of excellent advice from Calderwood — how it were best to avoid bad company, and how to know a thriving kid from a weakling, — Christopher set forth one May morning. A mile out from Lastbrook it struck him as commendable to take with him Rinyon Crozier. Not only did he question his ability to select a flock of goats, but, his mind jumping hopefully to an immediate consummation of the sale, he did not relish the prospect of piloting single-handed through the woods from Malden to Meadowcreek some dozen of skipping kids. He fetched a compass round by the minister's woodland, and, good hap having it that Rinyon was chopping there, bade him come with him.

Crozier deliberated. "I'll make't right with the Parson," Christopher promised headlong. "We've no time to ask his leave now. Come first, and then ask, so he cannot help himself."

"I'm na so sure," muttered Crozier, but he put his axe scrupulously under shelter and fell into step at Christopher's heels.

They went by a footpath over the ridge of wooded hillocks at the back of Meadowcreek, and so into the trail beyond Trull's cabin that at last would swing them into the open road by Malden. From the higher ground they could see the miles of varying tree-tops, the sombre green of pines, the

tenderer leafage of new-springing oaks and birches, that heaped away, layer upon layer, to the faint blue sky-line. Here and there showed an indentation that told of the clearing of some hamlet or lone farmstead, but for the most the woods rolled onward, free and unbroken. Christopher glanced back at Crozier, silent and, he knew, preoccupied with what might befall him for this stolen expedition, and he spoke out what often had been on his tongue: "Why the vengeance do you pocket it up, Rinyon? Let this man Trescott say to you 'Do this!' and you do it, while here's the open forest, and there're fishing-stations to northward where a stout fellow could get passage home to England, and no question made, or there're the schismatics at Aquidnay—"

"There's a plenty of tawny-skins in the woods, too," answered Crozier; he pulled a handful of the young beech leaves from a bough stretched across their path, and chewed them as he trudged. "When we came first intil the land, some o' the loons were on the ship with me tried how their shanks might help 'em. But the tawnies brought 'em in, and they gat the lash for their pains."

They had come down from the hill-slope now, and the ridge at their back cut off the heat of the sun. Before them, where the valley opened out, specks of light sifted through the thin tree-tops and wavered to and fro on the moss that made the path soft. The oak trees here stood wide in ground that was clear of undergrowth, so the two men could walk abreast and their talk flowed the freer. "Ye ken 'twere a bairn's trick to rin into the woods at the first," Crozier harked back in his defence. "I thought not to venture, not till I were acquaint with the country and the salvage folk. Ay, and a body must have weapons and siller thereto. And now that I ken the country—aweel! I'll not be off till you've bought those goats."

Christopher took him a clap on the shoulder. "You fool!" he had opened his mouth to speak, when Crozier caught his wrist. "Did ye na hear?" he asked breathlessly.

The younger man stopped then, with chin raised, and he, too, heard it, a faint little cry, his own name, that faltered away. He swung about, and, leaning against a tree a little behind them, he spied a woman's figure. "It's Recompense," he said low, and breakneck both men darted back along the path.

Christopher had guessed aright. When they came to the spot, they found the Quaker girl sitting among the bleached leaves at the foot of a tree, with head downbent and hands tight wrung upon her lap. Beneath the edge of her drabbed shag petticoat her shoes were broken, and her head was bare. "What's gone wrang, lass?" asked Crozier; and at the word she raised her face, and in her eyes was a frightened questioning that brought Christopher down on his knees beside her: "Why, little sister, what have they done to you? Here? alone? in such case? Where's your mother?"

Her set lips parted in piteous trembling, "She will na vex thee ever again," and the next moment she had yielded her tense body to his arms and was sobbing out the story: "We came unto Boston as the Light taught us. We went unto the worship-house in sackcloth with ashes upon our heads. They pelted us and dragged us unto their prison; they said we should be whipped for that we came back from banishment. But a great fever came on my mother— Oh, mother, mother!"

Christopher quieted her again, petting and coaxing with his voice, till presently she choked over the last words: "So I was to be whipped, even this day. But the jailer's wife— me-thinks she had compassion—the door stood unbolted and I fled—"

"Broke prison?" ejaculated Crozier.

"I know—'tis written I should give my cheek— But surely God doth not ask it of me that I suffer men to strip me."

"God's death! they shan't," swore Christopher.

The girl pressed a little closer to him. "I knew thou wouldst take care o' me," she murmured, while the two men, above her head, gazed into each other's blank faces.

Crozier at length broke silence with a dry question or two; then stroked his chin and pondered on her answers. "Nane hae followed ye, to your knowledge? Weel, we must find shelter for the bairnie, Christie, and then —"

"Trull's cabin," Ferringham answered decisively; he helped the girl to her feet, and slowly the three plodded back along the Meadowcreek trail.

It was past noon and the highest heat was gone from the air, when they came into Trull's untidy clearing. The proprietor was smoking his pipe on the threshold, but he started erect at sight of Recompense and clapped his arm across the door, as if he feared actual invasion. "No more Quaker trade for me," he repeated. "Forty shillings fine I risk for every hour she harbors here, and me a poor man!"

His querulous voice brought Joan to add her bitter word to the debate. Shelter that trollop again? 'Twas like the Kestrel's impudence. He had no care what he pulled on a poor man's head, so his own precious skin was safe.

"Will you keep the peace in your household, Ziba?" Christopher asked wearily. "I do not bid you do this thing for love." He drew a fistful of the loose coins from his pocket, chinked them together, then dropped them back. "Well?"

"Ay, the wench can bide here," Trull grumbled. "Though it be great risk. But give me twenty shillings earnest. I' fegs! we'll have a rouse with this," he added, as the money jingled in his hand.

Sullenly enough Joan bade her unwelcome guest within the house, but Recompense clung to Christopher, with such open dread of entering the cabin that he bade Rinyon lead her into the shelter of the trees at the southern edge of the clearing. He himself captured a basin of porridge under Joan's very guns and carried it to the girl, and, while she ate, he and Crozier took anxious counsel. "'Tis na place for a decent lass to bide," Crozier frowned worriedly. "'Twas bad enough when her mammie was here, but now!"

"Wildfire on't!" said Christopher, and went on to swear at Ziba till Recompense's shocked face made him bridle his tongue.

"At least I can lie here o' nights till this coil be ended," Crozier broke out at last. "I can carry't so they ken naught at Trescott's. And ye wadna fear, Recompense, gin I were by?"

"Surely, no. Thou art Christopher's friend," the girl answered, whereat Crozier shrugged his shoulders and strode back to his wood-chopping.

There would be no journey to Malden that day, and no flock of goats any day, Christopher thought ruefully, as he fingered the diminished store in his pockets. But he forced a care-free look to his face when he met Recompense's troubled eyes. "I'll stay with you till Rinyon comes again," he said, and — anything to keep the hunted look from her face — coaxed her in among the trees out of sight of the cabin which she disliked. Here beneath the wooded bank flowed the brook which entered the great salt creek by the village; at most times it was hardly more than a streamlet, but now with the spring rains it had swelled to a river. He told her of the trout that he had caught there, and he groped among the dead leaves, higher up the bank, and pulled for her some of the pink Mayflowers. By such shifts he once or twice won from her a tremulous smile that recalled his patient comrade of the winter woods, till he let slip, "But Nan should be here to tell you all; she is the lass who knows every bush and herb in the Massachusetts woods."

"The gentlewoman thou — lovest?" she asked, with eyes on the pink blossoms in her hands; and then: "Thou art not angered that I sought thee? Indeed, there was none else —"

"Angered? Renounce me, no!" he comforted.

The frogs were piping and the stars were out, when at last Crozier came to take his charge and Christopher was free to tramp home. The goats had not proved to his liking, he ex-

plained to Calderwood, and he was drolly amazed to find that it gave him now a little twinge to lie to his kinsman. Yet no way but systematic deceit seemed open to him, he reflected as he lay wakeful that night; he must make some other business touching those goats, and so get to Salem or to Boston, and induce some shipmaster to convey Recompense out of the jurisdiction; then Trull must be silenced, and those missing five pounds accounted for. Christopher groaned, as he thought on his relentless black and white account sheets.

Toward morning, when he awoke from an uneasy dream to front his perplexities, a desperate course commended itself to him. Why not confess the whole affair to his uncle? Calderwood was a magistrate, to be sure, but he had a young daughter of his own. Maybe if he looked on Recompense outside the court and realized what a child she was, he would be stirred to pity; after all, Christopher knew from his own experience, there were depths of kindliness in Calderwood.

But next morning ere Christopher could bring his courage to the point of asking his uncle for a word in private, disconcerting news upset the routine of the day. Rinyon Crozier galloped post-haste into the house-yard with an urgent message from Master Trescott; his sister, stout Mistress Jerinnah, had fallen and broken her hip; he prayed that her good friend, Mistress Calderwood, would come to her. The better to do his friend reverence, Calderwood bade saddle his horse and himself conveyed his wife to the house of sickness, so Christopher saw him no more till dinner-time, and then the Magistrate's brows were knit in a way that precluded the asking of favors. "A troublesome message from Boston, Christopher," he answered his nephew's question. "Three nights ago a Quaker wench who lay under sentence escaped out of the Jail."

"Of a truth?" said Christopher, intent on his trencher and his busy knife.

"She hath taken away to southward, 'tis said. An obstinate hussy, of whom a notable example should be made!"

Christopher looked his lips, and all the afternoon wrestled alone with his difficulties. Now that Elizabeth Calderwood was gone, the house seemed out of gear, and, perhaps because of his wakeful night, he was conscious within himself of a jangling nervousness. He was glad to slip away to the stable after supper, where he helped the men to feed the stock. He was particularly kind to the calves because they had been Nan's pets. If only she were here! He had never told her of the Quaker women, but he felt that now he would have told her and she would have known how to advise him.

The sky was dark, all but a pale strip to westward where a wisp of moon rode above the pines, when at last he lagged toward the house. By the doorstone a horse, all saddled, drooped its head, and within sounded the burr of voices. With hand on the latch, Christopher hesitated. "At nine a'clock in my dooryard," he heard one speak, and with unnecessary clatter he flung open the door.

Within the kitchen Calderwood and the Constable Gleason sat alone at table, with a candle and a flagon of beer between them. At the noise of the newcomer's entrance both looked up, and the Constable said "Good even" in a hearty enough voice, but Christopher could feel his presence unlooked for and undesired. He took a candle from the chimney-piece and sought in the banked fire for a coal. "I'm going to my chamber now, sir, along with the chickens. Bray wants me to stick the pease in the north field to-morrow, and I would be about it early."

"Light your candle here," said Calderwood, and held out the candlestick from the table. "You're going to keep the house this even, then? I'm glad for't." A question must have flashed to Christopher's face, for Calderwood added, "I would not have Lucy and the lads alone here. And I must go hence."

Christopher gave them good night, and, turning away up the kitchen stair, at once heard the two men speak aloud of the

heavy rains and the damage to the fields. But in his head went singing, "At nine a'clock in my dooryard. Keep the house this even." Up in his chamber he set the candle on the table, and stood watching it flicker in the gust from the open window. "It's not myself 'tis for," he muttered suddenly, and, slipping off his shoes, stole down again by the hall stair.

He threaded his way daintily through the black parlor, while his breath tightened as he thought on the shame of detection. A little light came in round the latch and through the crack beneath the door to the kitchen. Christopher pressed himself against the adjacent wall, and, holding his breath, listened. Just the grumble of voices at first he heard; then as he mastered the thudding in his chest, he made out the words disconnectedly: "They've strong waters. — Heaven knows whence he got the money! — Killion fetched the liquor from Boston. — A fair chance to snare the whole pestilence ging."

He was out in the hall again. With desperate clear-headedness he drew a stealthy hand across the house-door and felt that the bolt-bar lay in place; he could not go that way. He turned up the stairs, where a board snapped under his tread so he halted for a breathless moment, but he heard no sound below and in safety he regained his chamber. The candle had flared out in the draught, and, fumbling in the dark, he drew on his shoes and found his hat. Lighter than the blackness of the room showed through the window the rectangle of the night sky, and across it wavered the dense bar of a pine branch. Christopher stood an instant in the window, where the free wind swept in on him. "Last time was the night I harried the Constable's field," he muttered. Then he swung over the sill, and, catching at the branch, lowered himself hand over hand to the ground; the boughs gave crackling beneath his weight, but the windows of the house that watched him remained blank.

When once he had the springy turf beneath his feet, he drew breath and started on a run for the line of inky shadow at the western limit of the clearing. The dark field was treacherous with hummocks and hollows, but it was with no more than an under-consciousness that he avoided the pitfalls and kept his footing, for all his senses were bound up in listening for sounds from behind him. He heard the incessant call of the frogs, the sough of the pine trees before him, the thud of his own steps ; and then at last, as he dived into the pitch-black shadow of the woods, he heard, too, the unmistakable pad of horse-hoofs. Over his shoulder he saw two vague masses trot out from the shadow of the farmhouse. Calderwood and the Constable were setting forth already for their rendezvous. Ere they came to Trull's cabin they must cover two sides of a triangle, while his course lay along the base, but they were mounted and he was on foot.

Christopher ripped open his doublet, caught a second breath, and plunged into the woods. He went at a jog-trot now, with elbows swinging and chin thrust out. The branches grazed by his head ; before him the black ground rose and fell, and above the stars, too, were a-race. Now it was a reckless stumbling downhill ; then he went a-splash through one of the flooded brooks. The wisp of moon had gone out, he noted, as he breasted one hillock, and the starshine was pale. Then a palling darkness closed upon him, as he staggered into the hollow of the long swamp at the back of the Constable's lands, that was now awash with the overflow of the brook. The water splattered round his knees, and in the thicket near him some living thing splashed. Beyond the swamp he entered Gleason's upper cornland that lay along the brook, and recklessly he stamped straight across the new-sown field. But the air was yet void of human sound, save his own labored breathing ; he must be in time.

Speedily he was made sure thereof, for as he stumbled up the next rising ground, he saw below him a gleam of light that

must shine from Trull's cabin. Heedless of beaten paths, he crashed through the bushes, trampled down the briars, straight toward it. A noise of voices came now from before him, calls that were loud on the still air, a snatch of a song, then the thud of mugs on reëchoing boards. Now he was pashing across Trull's clearing; he stumbled over a bucket upturned by the doorstone, kicked it aside with a breathless curse, and, pitching against the door, burst into the room.

The air, fetid with the odor of tobacco and of bad liquor, choked him for the moment; the light dazzled his eyes so he saw blurrily the faces of the men before him. Their voices clanged round him: "Ay, 'tis the right Kestrel!" "All in good time!" "A cup here, Kester!"

"Lads, lads!" he gasped. "The Constable and the watch — they're hard on my heels. In God's name! where's Recom-pense?"

"I'll look to her," cried Crozier's voice. Dimly through the reek of the close room Christopher saw the Scotchman's tall figure dart up the ladder to the loft; for the moment, his own work was done, and, panting for breath, he dropped down on the form by the door.

The drinkers at table, all but Trull, whose head was down on his arms, blinked at him stupidly. "Constable!" Webb Hayne repeated thickly. "Constable! Cock's wounds! I —" He rose to his feet and swayed an instant; then came reeling to the form. Hard by Christopher stood a bucket of water, and into it Webb soused his head splashingly. "Gramercy for this, Kester!" he spoke, as he shook the water from his hair, then reached for his fowling-piece and sped out at the door.

Pritchard fell a-chuckling and wagging his gray head, but Dearmont Killion sprang to his feet. "Gleason, is it?" he yelled. "Damn him, body and bones and blood! I ben't afeard of him nor no man. Come, you, Kester Ferringham, that brag of beating me, off wi' your doublet! Uncase, man, uncase! I'll learn ye —"

It was poor sport to close with a drunken man, but in his own defence Christopher tripped up the fellow's heels and sent him sprawling. He heard the crash with which Dearmont struck the floor, the creak of the ladder, Pritchard's cackle of laughter; then Rinyon, steady-eyed and grave-mouthed, stood beside him and Recompense was clutching his arm. "Take the lassie," Crozier bade, and, thrusting Dearmont aside with his foot, strode to the fireplace where hung Trull's fowling-piece that had been Christopher's, and snatched it down.

Then they were out of the cabin, in the clean air of the night, and, with Recompense between them, were hurrying across the open to the sparse woods along the brook. "What is't you mean?" labored Christopher, with breath scarce recovered. "Where go you, Rinyon?"

"Out o' Meadowcreek and awa!" blazed the other. "Time to be gane, Christie. She canna bide here, she canna gae her lane. I'll gae with her. Southward unto Plymouth, and my ain man again."

"Hark, oh, hark!" whispered Recompense.

An instant, with breath indrawn, they listened, and, sharper than the sound of a heart-beat, they heard in the blackness on their left hand the guarded snapping of bushes. Next moment, against the dark sky at the summit of the rising ground, loomed a man's black figure. Speechless, Crozier plucked Christopher's sleeve, and, bending low, they crept away through the bushes and down the slope which the land made to the brook-side.

With muffled splash, Crozier stepped into the water, hesitated there an instant, a dense black figure in the dimness, and turned shoreward again. "There be holes, and the current rins swift," he whispered. "I darena ford here wi' the lass. There lies a canoe below i' the Constable's field. I took note this day. Can we —"

"Ay, run!" bade Christopher.

Silent as might be, but at a round pace, they headed eastward into the very jaws of their foes. Alders and osiers twisted a barrier through which they must break their way, and the overflow of the brook made the ground slimy. Always with them, too, fled the terror of pursuit that set the blood pounding in Christopher's temples. Save for the frogs, the night was voiceless, but his straining ears found hostile rumors in the snap of a twig, the mere ripple of the water, and, in agony for the girl beside him, he gripped her wrist and hurried her forward. "'Slife! you shall come out o' their hands," he spoke through clenched teeth, and he marvelled at the calmness, almost like content, with which she answered, "Nay, thou art here. I am not afraid."

Then the vast scroll of the stars swept into sight above them, as they burst from the woods into the open field. In the stead of the dank forest leaves they waded through lush grass and flags on the oozy shore, and there, snugly laid in the sedge, Crozier found the canoe. They launched it noiselessly upon the black water, and, unbidden, Christopher stepped in after Recompense. "I'll bring it back to this side; they'll never be able to track you," he answered Crozier's questioning look.

"That's yoursel, Christie!" his friend muttered, and slid the one paddle into the water. The ripples eddied about the canoe; on the right hand a frog sprang chug into the brook. The depth of the channel blackened on either side; the water ran so still that the stars wavered on its surface, but it ran swift and strong, so that the canoe, driven resistlessly downstream, had to make a long diagonal crossing. But at last the starshine ebbed and darkened out, as the shadow of the opposite trees closed over the craft, and softly its bow was buried in the sedges.

Christopher sprang out into the mud and helped Recompense step to the firm ground where the trees began. In the black shade of the trees, too, he pressed into Rinyon's hand all the money that his pockets held. "Take't," he whispered.

"For you and the wench. God bring you safe away, dear old lad!" He threw his arms about Crozier, and his laugh was unsteady: "Refuse me but I'd run away with you, were't not for the one you know of!"

Then he turned hastily to Recompense's dark little figure; he could not see her face, but by her struggling breaths he knew that she was near to weeping. "Don't be afraid," he comforted. "Do as Rinyon bids —"

"Oh, Christopher, prithee!" She cried in earnest now, but he dared not stay to soothe her. With no more than a whisper to be of good cheer, and a hurried pat of the shoulder, he thrust her into Crozier's arms, and plunged back to the shore.

A moment yet he lingered there, ankle-deep in sedge and mire, till the two dark figures were swallowed in the safe thickness of the woods; then, plashing into the water, he launched the canoe. The current was all against him now. The water wrenched at the paddle, and, wearied as he was with much running, he found both breath and strength were failing him. Foot by foot he fought his way, upstream and cross stream, and foot by foot the current thrust him back. There came a moment when the best he could do was to hold the canoe steady while he caught breath, and in that instant it seemed to him that the black alders, there at the landing-place in the cornfield, wavered ominously.

Hesitating, he brought the canoe round, broadside to the shore, and at that movement of retreat inky figures started to the water's edge, and with appalling glare a pine torch, almost in his eyes, it seemed, flashed out. Christopher saw the ripples of fire surge along the brook toward him, and, jerking his broad felt hat across his face, he struck the paddle into the water. Yonder the black line of shadow began again, but ere he could reach it, the Constable's challenging voice rang out, "You in the canoe, pull in to land, or I give fire!"

Christopher bent forward and swung the paddle more swiftly. The bow of the canoe touched the edge of the black water just as two pistol shots cracked out of the torch glow.

The current caught the canoe astern and swung it downstream with such force that he need no more than guide it with his paddle. The long swamp would delay his pursuers; in the canoe he could reach the downstream side long ere they had skirted round it on the landward end. They had not seen his face; they could not swear to him for a mere glimpse of a figure in a moving canoe. Then it was that he realized that his left hand rested laxly on the paddle, and he felt something sticky and warm spread on his arm. "I'm hit," he repeated stupidly.

The blank catastrophe that that might entail held him numb, and in that powerless instant he heard the grinding crash with which the canoe stove upon a rock. On his left hand, very near, lay the last of the black tangle of the swamp; he was out of the channel of the brook and into the flooded meadow. Springing over into the shallow water, he pushed off the canoe, that it might not betray his landing-place, and plashed softly to the more solid ground.

His head was quite clear and cool, but his feet were heavy, and the going was far rougher than on his outward course. "I will get home and wash the hurt, and put on a clean shirt and be in my bed, very innocent, when my uncle comes in," he repeated to himself, and the thought of the blissful feel of cool water on his aching arm gave him strength to stumble on. He came into the main roadway from Meadow-creek to Lastbrook; the ground was smoother there, and the smell of the wet pines was bracing.

He was jogging at little more than a footpace now, with eyes upon the black road that rolled away so slowly, nor did he trouble to raise his head, till the stubble of the home-clearing was under his feet. Then he looked for some light at the farm, but the house lay dark. It must be past midnight,

for every nerve of him was slackened as in the dead time of early morning. When he came to the foot of the pine tree beneath his chamber window, he clutched its lowest bough and an instant leaned against it. His head was bare, he realized, for he felt the sticky pressure of the bark against his temple.

He had made a movement to swing himself up among the branches, when he heard some one call his name, "Christopher!" and he pressed deeper in among the boughs.

"Christopher! Oh, prithee speak, if 'tis you!" the cry came once more. It was Lucy's voice, and in it such distress that he could only drop to ground again and go to the window of her bedroom where she leaned forth. "What is it, cousin?" he asked in a low tone.

"It is you? I saw from the window and feared 'twas some ill-doer. I am so glad 'tis you. Come round to the kitchen door."

When he crossed the threshold, his story was ready. "I'm sorry I frightened you, coz. I could not sleep, so I clambered out at my window an hour or more agone. I thought to slip back — Why, what's amiss?"

For Lucy, kerchiefless and with unbound hair, was almost crying, and yonder on the settle by the fire Taffy, wrapped in a coverlet, curled in a distressful heap. "He hath an ear-ache," whimpered Lucy. "If mother were only here! And father hath gone forth with the men, and I know not what to do, and he hath cried and cried, poor little heart!"

Straightway Taffy lifted up his voice again with indignant sobs of outwearied patience. "My poor old man!" said Christopher, going to him. "There, there, Rittmeister, don't cry. Eh? Can I do aught for you?"

The child turned his swimming eyes upon him. "Sing — to — me," he choked.

Christopher hesitated, then, wrapping the coverlet closer about the little fellow, lifted him in his arms, and, pacing the floor, began to sing: —

“ ‘I spied a ship, and a ship was she,
Sing, oh, the low and the Lowlands low,
And she was called the Sweet Trinity,
She was sailing in the Lowlands, low, low, low,
She was sailing in the Lowlands low.’ ”

The movement of his arm had set the half-stanchèd wound bleeding again; he felt the shirt-sleeve cleaving to his flesh.

“ ‘He bent his breast and away swam he,
Sing, oh, the low and the Lowlands low—’ ”

“What is that?” Lucy caught her breath. “Horsemen are coming? Oh, ’tis father back at last!”

Christopher halted in the middle of the kitchen, with the child pressed close to his breast, and waited. He heard one cry “Whoa!” without in the house-yard, the rattle of the latch, and the Constable’s voice saying, “Keep ye back, sirs.” Then the door had opened, closed, and Calderwood and the Constable Gleason faced him.

“Go into your chamber, Lucy,” Calderwood ordered. “Take the child.”

“’Tis pity to wake him, sir,” Christopher answered slowly. “Suffer me lay him down. I’ll come back.” He followed his cousin into the little eastern chamber. It was Nan’s room, he remembered dully, even as he laid Taffy upon the narrow bed. When he turned to the door, he saw Nan’s old blue gown that she had worn about the house hung beside it; an instant ere he passed into the kitchen, he leaned against the wall with his face hidden in the blue folds.

CHAPTER XVI

WITH ALL HIS IMPERFECTIONS ON HIS HEAD

HE closed the bedroom door behind him, and, with his hand still heavy on the latch, faced the men who awaited him. On the kitchen table the candle flared in a conical flame, and a wide shadow covered the wall against which he leaned. "Come forth into the light," the Constable bade, and, stepping to him, clapped down one hand on his left arm.

Christopher winced out of his hold; in the sudden pain that throbbed through the hurt arm he saw the floor heave upward. He reeled a pace or two toward the table and gripped the back of the armchair that stood by it.

"Your sleeve is wet," said Gleason.

Christopher flung back his head and an instant gazed from Calderwood's set face to the stolid Constable on whose lips the damning questions were forming themselves. His eyes dropped, and he noted that his shoes were sodden with wet and with mire and his stockings were spattered even to the knee. "Yes, 'tis my blood on my sleeve," he muttered, and, fumbling with his hand along the back of the chair, dropped down upon it.

"So I nicked you, then," commented Gleason, and, with never a "By your leave," slipped the doublet off Christopher's injured arm and thrust back his shirt. "Nay, 'tis a clean shot-wound. You'll be fit for devilry again ere the week be out. Will you reach me hither a rag and a basin o' water, Calderwood?"

As the Magistrate placed upon the table what was needed

for dressing the wound, Christopher looked up and met his gaze. He noted that Calderwood's brows were drawn and his nostrils compressed, and when he spoke, his voice was lower than its wont: "You stole away to your lewd companions, then, after all? With all your promises and protestations you went forth of my house to carry a warning to those runagates? From this very room —"

"Ay, sir," Christopher bowed his head.

A moment, and he heard Calderwood's decisive step crossing the kitchen, the clatter with which the house-door opened, and then the Magistrate's voice speaking into the night, "Leave the saddle on my horse, Bray."

"Come, come, sir," — the Constable paused in the midst of bandaging Christopher's arm — "you cannot think I'll be putting your nephew under lock and key, and he wounded? If I have your word for't that he'll appear in court, why, I'll leave him to you."

"Give my word that he appear in court?" Calderwood spoke measuredly. "Man, how am I to do that? What hold have I on this fellow? Honor, gratitude, decency — you see what share they have had in his dealings with me this night. Now he quits this house. Nay, I have been patient, Matthew, I have been very patient. But this passes long-suffering. He must go, and go now. I would not have my wife afflicted further. Thank Heaven she is hence to-night! Ere she returns, he must be gone."

Christopher rose uncertainly to his feet, and stood fastening his shirt with a hand that shook. Through the flare of the perishing candle he gazed a moment on Calderwood's hard-set face; then he turned and staggered toward the outer door. It was Gleason, he realized, who stayed him time enough to throw his doublet over his shoulders; then he was out under the starlight, where the horses stamped and whickered in the house-yard and the Constable's sworn deputies were waiting for him.

A raw wind, with the chill of the dawn in it, was sweeping in from the harbor when the sorry cavalcade pulled up at the Constable's door. Chilled to the bone, Christopher stumbled into the kitchen as he was bidden; there was a fire on the hearth, and, with the light of it dazing his eyes, he stood submissive while the Constable searched him. Gleason took away his knife, and, with a grim word of comment, took the bale of dice which Christopher had neglected in those days to remove from his pocket, then bade his prisoner follow him.

They trudged up a steep stair between walls and, down a narrow passage, entered a dim room. A pallet stood against the wall where the ceiling pitched downward, and heedlessly Christopher cast himself upon it. No, his arm gave him no pain, he snapped in answer to Gleason's brusque question; he only wanted to be left alone. So Gleason, taking the candle, went out, and locked and bolted the door behind him. When the key grated in the lock, Christopher lifted his head, and at the foot of the pallet he now saw that the open window was barred with rods of iron that were black against the paling night.

So he was left, sick and in prison and alone. It was the loneliness, above all, that weighed upon him, after the first feverish hours when the pain of his wound took his thoughts. He saw no man but Gershom Field, who brought him his rations—porridge of a morning, bread and water at night,—and Gleason himself, who, as if it were all in the day's work, sauntered in each morning to dress his arm afresh; for Gershom he had an amused contempt that would have suffered him find diversion in the serving-man's discourse, if the fellow had not proved surly and silent, but for Gleason he kept only the bitterest dislike. The ex-Roundhead, Christopher felt smartingly, had had the better of him several times ere this, had the better of him now, and he read the amused consciousness of triumph in the Constable's every look and winced at the necessary touch of his hand.

By the second day this isolation had made him so desperate that he demanded writing materials and sent Calderwood a letter—a flippant, miserable scrawl that asked for “a cleane shirte” and “some terbacca” and his “booke of the Decameron.” He had a hopeful feeling that perhaps, dizzy and faint as he had been on the night of his arrest, he had exaggerated the sternness of his kinsman’s bearing; still, the taunt at his underhand dealings stuck by him so that he addressed his letter, not to Elizabeth, who, he knew, would help him, but to Calderwood himself.

Next morning, when Gleason came to look to him, he brought an answer which Christopher asked leave to read on the spot. He found it brief enough:—

MY GOOD CHRISTOPHER: Your vain letter I have given to the fire; send me no more such saucy writings. For tobacco, you were better think on something other than gross pleasure, and instead of the book of loose tales for which you clamor, ask the Constable to lend you a Bible. Surely, if there be spark of grace in you, you should begin to feel some contrition for the shame which you have plucked upon us all. Until you do show some sign of a broken and penitent spirit, you need look for no aid from me.

Your obedient servant,

NATHAN CALDERWOOD.

Christopher shredded the letter across, crushed it in his hand, and dashed it to the floor. “Wildfire take him for a canting Puritan! I can thrive without him.” He stamped to his feet and swore furiously, till the realization that Gleason was watching made him pull up. “You need not trouble about my arm,” he ordered, wild to be rid of his old antagonist who must have enjoyed his outburst. “I can look to it myself.”

“You sit down,” Gleason cut him short. “I’ve got other business than to hear you damning your own soul. And for your arm, I’m not troubling over it out o’ love for you, Kester, but I’ve no mind to bring you into the Boston Court with a gangrened wound and be questioned for neglecting you.”

Christopher sat down abruptly. "Boston?" he repeated, with his high tone abated. "Am I to be tried there?"

"This is no twenty shilling matter for the local court. That canoe o' mine ye staved in was worth three pounds. And in any case, your uncle could not sit alone to judge you in a serious matter. So you'll lodge in Boston Jail as soon as I hold you fit to travel. The Captain took your mates thither three days ago."

Christopher forgot his apprehensions for himself in the keen desire to know which of his mates had been taken, but the morbid fear lest the most roundabout questioning set the Constable on Crozier's trail, made him bite down on his tongue. Gleason would volunteer no information, so he remained ignorant as to whether Crozier had escaped till the fourth day, when he was delivered over to the Boston jailer.

He had had a pleasant ride to the town; he was a prisoner, to be sure; at one stirrup rode the Constable, at the other was Amariah Soper, sworn in as deputy; but at least he was out in the air again, and to his eyes, wearied of gazing on blank walls, the spring woods and the open fields and the blue water were full of hope. He strode across the threshold of the Jail with his head erected jauntily, called back a mocking farewell to his guards, and then he stood in a close-barred room, and Crozier was not there. Trull, Pritchard, Killion, a chapfallen trio, were all whom the nets of Meadowcreek justice had ensnared, and so relieved was Christopher that the fourth, whom he had dreaded to find, was absent, that he could have embraced them.

The three were oddly shy of him, but that was perhaps from the fright they were in. Killion preserved his surly defiance, but the two others were thoroughly cowed. "Ye won't speak word o' that Quaker slut? 'Twould pull a mort o' fines on me, and my back must pay't. And I harbored her at your asking, and you swore to hold me scathless." That was Trull's whining burden, all the next day, a Sunday, that they were boxed up together.

"I shall let them hold that I was drunk with the rest, and say naught," Christopher promised him. Silence as to the Quaker girl was indeed the one course; not only might she and Crozier not yet be in a place of safety, but something, after all, was due to Trull, mean rascal though he was. At heart, too, Christopher realized he would get more favor at the hands of the Court as a mere drunken rioter than as an abettor of heretic Quakers. What would befall him, anyway? he wondered, and the wonder held him awake half the night before his trial. More fines would probably be loaded upon him, and that meant so many months more of labor ere he could stand free of debt and claim Nan. How happy it was that she was absent while this trouble was on him! It would all be over ere she returned.

That last thought made his sleep vaguely content, and he rose in the morning in high spirits. It was a rare bright day, and, resolutely ignoring the Marshal's men at his elbow, he held his head erect during the progress through the pebbled streets to the meeting-house, where sat the Assistants' Court. But with the first step which he took into the gloomy, wide room, a chill that was not all physical smote him. The Magistrates, ranged at the table below the pastor's desk, the taciturn officers, the grave, watching citizens, gave to the barren place an air of formality, even of menace, that quenched Christopher's spirits. From his place at the bar, while he waited for the Meadowcreek case to be tried, he took anxious note of his judges. Master Endicott, the governor, grim and old and grizzled, with the brusqueness of the veteran major-general in his bearing and the half-bridled temper of the hot-headed gentleman in his deep-set eyes, held the highest place on the bench, and on his right hand Thomas Dudley, the deputy governor, huddled in his thick cloak, for all the warmth of the day; he was a very old man; the hand he rested on the table before him was shrivelled and veiny, and the bridge of his nose was thin almost to transparency. Blunt Richard Belling-

ham, thin-lipped Increase Nowell — Christopher glanced over the row of unpitied faces till his eyes met Calderwood's eyes and slowly dropped.

Down in the body of the room, whither he gazed now, he saw the Constable Gleason, and scowled and looked away. There by the door was Captain Enoch's yellow jacket, and the heart gave a great jump into his throat as he recognized in the squat, smug man with whom the Captain whispered his creditor, Gamlyn. Christopher fell to chewing his underlip, and, looking down at the cracks that ran in the floor at his feet, did not raise his eyes till a little stir and movement in the court room and the calling of his name warned him that his trial was at hand.

Calderwood had quitted the bench and, as a mere onlooker, sat now at the clerk's table. He held a pen in his hand, and he was trimming the point with scrupulous nicety. Michael Gamlyn had come forward and was making long plaint of an overdue debt, and Christopher answered mechanically a question or two that they asked him. Then he was startled into tingling consciousness of his position, for a woman came forward to testify, and he knew her at once for Joan Trull. With a half shrug he gave himself for lost, and did but smile at her testimony — how he had come to the cabin with a warning and tarried to drink with the rest, and made his escape when the watch broke in on them. The Constable Gleason followed her with honest testimony as to the cance and Christopher's arrest, even as to the bale of dice in his pocket, at mention of which the judges looked black. Soper, a corroborative second witness, followed Gleason, and Master Endicott asked a question or two of the prisoners: What was Christopher Ferringham doing in that cance?

Christopher hesitated one instant, while he thought on Crozier, perhaps still in the jurisdiction; then, "I don't remember, sir," he said engagingly, and knew that in their thoughts all held him, by his own admission, bemused with drink that night.

Then he realized that Endicott had turned to Ziba Trull. "Whence was it you had money to buy strong waters for this debauch, sirrah?" he heard him question, and Trull stammered, "'Twas the Kestrel — saving your Honor's reverence — Christopher Ferringham here gave me the chinks."

A moment the grave heads on the bench drew together; there was a mutter of "idlers," "rakeshames," "confirmed evil-livers"; then Master Endicott turned once more to the prisoners: "Ere sentence be passed upon you, you have leave to speak freely, so it be within the bounds of decency. Have you aught to say?"

Yes, Pritchard had to say that he was a vessel filled to the brim with affliction. He had a pious wife, and he himself once had walked in the paths of grace where he fain would tread again. Might not the mercy of the Court spare a bruised reed? To the same end, Ziba: he was a poor man with a crazed body; he had not sinned, were he not led by others whom he deemed his betters. He prayed their clemency. And Dearmont Killion?

"I claim no worse than is meted to Kester Ferringham," snarled the ex-bondman. "'Tis no law of God nor man that he go free because of the cut of his coat, when he —" With swift detail Dearmont swung into the relation of Christopher's twelvemonth in Massachusetts — how he was brawling in the alehouse the first night he set foot in Meadowcreek, how he lurked in the woods and cozened his kinsman of money offered in reward for news of him, how he hired Dearmont himself to seize Master Calderwood's sister for him and beat his agent for his failure.

There Christopher's eyes sought Calderwood, and he saw the Magistrate's face was tense and the pen was broken in his hands.

On swept Dearmont — drinking-bouts, gaming-bouts, fisticuffs, every scatter-headed escapade of the twelvemonth, even to the tale of Master Winthrop's horse, whereat Captain Robert

Bridges, on the bench, gave a sudden chuckle which, under the gaze of his brother Magistrates, he turned into a mighty cough.

Sheer breathlessness at last, it seemed, made the informer stand mute, and Christopher spoke slowly, "Your Honors, is it your justice to condemn me for that this fellow hath belched out every foul story of me that the gossips have spread abroad?"

But Master Bellingham turned to Calderwood: "I pray you, sir, since you sit in judgment at Meadowcreek, how often and on what charges hath this man Ferringham been brought before you?"

Coily Calderwood recited the list of offences he had punished — drinking, dicing, swearing, Sabbath breaking, pilfering, brawling. "Verily, there seemeth here more than mere slanderous tales," commented Master Nowell.

Then, after brief parley, Governor Endicott voiced the sentence of the Court: Pritchard, Trull, Killion, overtaken for the third time in drink, should pay the trebled fine of thirty shillings or, in default thereof, be flogged with ten stripes upon the naked back and should find sureties for their good behavior; for Christopher Ferringham, he should satisfy Matthew Gleason in the sum of three pounds for the canoe which he had destroyed in his drunkenness; he should quit Michael Gamlyn his debt of eight pounds; to the Commonwealth he should, in satisfaction for his continued profane and disorderly walking, pay five pounds, and he should find two sufficient sureties for his good behavior.

An instant Christopher strove to bite his mustache, then a laugh of utter helpless resignation rippled over his face. "Sixteen pounds? The devil take me if I've a shilling or a friend to borrow of!" he said in his most winning voice.

Old Thomas Dudley, with the hand of death already upon him, raised his head from his breast. "Then let this rogue's body make atonement," he counselled in a thin voice. "Let him be whipped, and sharply, too."

Said Christopher, with his face whitening to the lips, "Master Dudley, I am a gentleman."

"Gentleman!" John Endicott towered upon his feet. "Will you drag forth your tattered coat-armor now to save your body? Your gentry, forsooth, that you have prostituted among lewd knaves, profane scoffers, blasphemers, profligates! And you, the head of them all, do whimper now, Spare me for the sake of my gentle blood! I tell thee, sirrah, there is one law in Massachusetts for the libertine gentleman and the libertine churl. Thou wilt make a mock of order and decency? Then orderly and decent folk shall make their sport of thee. Thou wilt be idle and profitless? We shall find means to make thee be of use. For thy soul's good be thankful thou art so dealt with that thy devilish pride may be broken down. You, Michael Gamlyn, Matthew Gleason, to whom this fellow stands in debt, settle it between you; since he cannot pay in money, he shall do as do the penniless landloupers to whom he hath levelled himself—work out his debts by the labor of his hands, as your servant. Moreover, for the satisfaction of the Commonwealth, let the Meadowcreek constable convey him back to the village, and see that there, on the next lecture day, if the weather permit, he be set in the stocks for the space of four hours."

Christopher stared, not at Endicott, but at Captain Bridges; a great fly was crawling on the judges' table, and Bridges, with a wary movement, sought to trap it. Then it came over him that the many white faces in the room all were turned toward him, and he sat down slowly, and once more studied the cracks at his feet. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Enoch's yellow jacket. The Captain had stridden up to the clerk's table; he heard the chink of money and heard his honest voice speaking: "I'll quit two fines, your Honors. For the man Trull, I did him a wrong once, and Killion, he hath served me on the sea. I'll be their surety."

Christopher flashed a glance at his comrades; there was no

surprise in their faces. He understood, and he wondered that he did not spring upon the men who had betrayed him, but the heart for any action was gone out of him.

Killion and Trull went free; Pritchard, whose fine was paid by Goodman Naylor, went free; and so it was that that afternoon, when the Constable Gleason set forth on the return ride to Meadowcreek, he conveyed under his guard but one prisoner, sullen and set-faced and securely handcuffed. In the desperate need of escape that was on him, Christopher had refused to give his parole, but though, as if in mockery, the night shut in starless and the road wound through woods and marshes where, within stone's cast, were safe coverts, there was no escape for him while the shackles weighed on his wrists and his horse's bridle was looped over Gleason's saddle-bow. Raging with his utter helplessness, he found himself once more inside the Constable's kitchen, and a moment later, when his hands at last were freed, the stout door of his old prison was locked upon him.

Even now hope did not quite forsake him, but in the glare of the next morning he set himself to the task of breaking his prison. Whatever he did must be done quickly, for it was already a Tuesday and Thursday was lecture day, the day of his public punishment. He scanned his prison closely: it was the chamber above the Constable's kitchen — a long, narrow room with a pitched roof running almost to the floor, two low windows, one at either end, and a stout door in the inner wall.

Desperately he examined every bar at the windows, praying that he might find a loosened screw, a weakness in the planks, a flaw in the iron itself. But Gleason was a smith before he was a constable; the windows were barred with such pitiless security that, wrenching at them, Christopher contrived only to tear his hand so it bled. He had no implement to aid him; they had taken away his knife, and with his hard daily fare they allowed him no more than a wooden spoon. And the room was bare; no saving scrap of iron was to be found, though

he searched every crack and corner on hands and knees. The sole furnishing was his pallet—a board or two nailed firmly together, a hard mattress, and a blanket.

Christopher jumped to his feet from the final scrutiny and stood gazing at the inexorable door, with his body tense as for a spring and the perspiration stinging on the back of his neck. A moment the instinct to fling himself at the door, to beat at the panels with his fists, near overmastered him. Limp and shivering, he sat down on his pallet. He was quite helpless, he knew now, trapped, penned there, till they should choose to drag him forth into the market place. He dropped his head upon his knees.

But in the night while he cursed his powerlessness, he called to mind his uncle's letter. "Until you show sign of contrition, I will not aid,"—that meant, "If you show sign of contrition, I will aid." He was fairly sure of the words, but he wished now he had kept the letter by him. Why not ask Calderwood to quit his fines and redeem him, then? Of course, Calderwood was angry, any man would be; he must think that Christopher had deceived him in the matter of breaking with his old associates, that he had squandered that five pounds for drink. "But I'll tell him everything," thought Christopher. After all, Calderwood was a good fellow, and he had looked troubled, there at court; he was a gentleman and would realize the bitterness of what his nephew was condemned to suffer.

He would send Calderwood a letter, then, but for ways and means he was for a moment at stand. Gleason no longer came near him, since his arm was healing rapidly, and it was too humiliating to send for the man and ask him for pen and paper and messenger to carry a letter to Calderwood, after he had heard Christopher cursing his uncle. So in the end, the lesser of two evils, Christopher applied to Gershon Field, when he brought him his morning meal, and persuaded him to fetch the writing materials and say nothing to Gleason.

About mid-morning Christopher settled himself to write; there was no stool nor table in the room, and his pallet, hard enough to lie on, was not hard enough for a writing table, so of necessity he stretched himself on the floor. There he fell to his task, writing slowly, for he had need to pick his words. He must not be flippant this time, nor would he be too abject; rather, he strove at the brief, businesslike tone which Calderwood affected. He must be brief, above all things, for the scrap of paper was small, and Christopher wrote a sprawling hand: —

GODE UNCLE —

He was sorry then that he had not written "Gode Sir" which were more formal.

I doe claime yr. promise. Belike itt was not so binding as a promise & I would nott aske what you dide not offer. But I be ready to telle you all that befell the night when I was apprehended. Indeed, Sir, itt is not so ill as it doth seeme. I woulde not that you helde me all ungratful. I am sencible you dealt kindly by mee, & for that money Zibba had I can explaine.

There Christopher reread; then lay back, with his arm beneath his head, and scowled at a gray spider's web in the roof. The letter seemed too humble, he feared. But there was no more paper, so perforce he resumed on the same sheet: —

Nowe, Sir, I wille not pray you paye my fines. That is, if you doe paye them, I wille pay you back to the laste groat and interest thereon. They have sentenced mee to work out my indebtedness with Gleason or with Gamlyn. Beseach you, Sir, let it bee with you. I can worke harder than I have these laste weeks, I doe assure you. And I wille not claime any place in yr. householde, only to bee as one of yr. servants. But if I must serve, lett mee serve you rather than Gamlyn or the Constable.

He read this paragraph three times over, and lovingly blackened the tails of the letters; it struck him as clear-headed and peculiarly sensible.

I cannott come to you, Sir, soe I hope you will come to mee & heare what I have to saye and judge mee yourself.

Yours assured faithful newew,

XTOPHER FERRINGHAM.

All the long afternoon he read and reread the letter, and found a hundred things he wished away, and longed for another piece of paper. At the last, when he heard Gershom's step without the door, terror seized him lest the letter, that was his only hope, were not strong enough, lest Calderwood might not understand. He caught up the scratchy pen and in the little space below his signature, crowded in the words that came:—

I cannot beare this they would putt upon mee. For God his love helpe.

The door rattled open, and hurriedly he doubled the letter into its old folds. "Will you take this to Master Calderwood, Gershom?" he asked, with his old high-handed manner softened by the piteous desire to win what friendliness he could. "If ever I come clear o' this, I'll hold you in mind."

Gershom demurred; he was not set to fetch and carry for every rakehell who was suffering his just punishment. "Ask Master Calderwood to give you sixpence; tell him 'tis my will," Christopher proffered at last, and, still grumbling, the man gave a grudging promise and quitted the room.

Christopher took in his hand the bread that formed his supper, and sat down on the floor by the northern window whence he could see a bit of the road that Gershom must go. Below in the kitchen he heard the scrape of stools; the household would be at supper now. In his chamber the light was paling, and out-of-doors all was shadow. A step in the house-yard beneath

made him look thither eagerly, but it was only Enoch Gleason in his eternal yellow jacket. Christopher flinched back from the window, but, looking forth aslant, he saw the Captain leap the fence into the road and walk away. The cottages on the village street speedily shut him from sight.

The dusk had closed in and the frogs were piping, when at last he spied Gershom's burly figure plodding forth. He strained his eyes till his messenger passed out of sight, and then he found himself, in his thought, following his steps. Now he had passed Elder Jeanison's house, the last in the village; now he was beyond the open fields, beyond the pine woods; now he was turning into the by-way to Lastbrook, he was crossing the open, he was at the farmhouse. Calderwood was reading the letter. Christopher could hear the tone in which he would say, "Well, I think 'Wild-Oats' pride hath been a little abated." He winced at remembrance of the last words he had written. Then Calderwood would take his hat and start thither; step by step Christopher followed him, and felt his heart thud as he approached.

But though steps sounded more than once in the roadway, and doors, clattering below, made him start, no one mounted his stair. The street became silent. The lights of the village went out. An instant, in the bitter disappointment, Christopher bowed his head upon his arm; next moment he was laughing: "'Slife! I'm foolish as a child or a woman. Why the devil should the man walk two miles of a black night? He'll be here with the morning. I'll get me to bed and sleep."

He lay down on his pallet, but sleep would not come. Away in the dusk a whip-poor-will was calling. He heard the watch in the street go the rounds each hour. Once he slept, and his dream was ill; another period of tossing and praying for dawn, then a stupor that brought little rest, and he found the morning breaking in his chamber. "But he won't come yet, not till after breakfast, not till mid-morning," Christopher repeated, with a tense holding of himself in hand.

He heard the Constable's household stir to waking in the rooms below him. Gershom came in to fetch him his porridge. "You took the letter, eh?" Christopher questioned, and the man snapped, "Yes!"

The minutes dragged out slowly. Christopher paced the room — so many steps across, so many back, that meant so many minutes passed till Calderwood should come. Every fifth crossing he looked out at the northern window. People strolled down the road by ones and twos. It must be drawing toward noon when the lecture was read, when he —

With a queer feeling of emptiness, Christopher sat down on the pallet. His breath came quickly, and a lump was in his throat. He longed to step to the window, and he dared not. Outside he heard shrill children's voices. All Meadowcreek would be gathered about the stocks. He felt something wet on his hand, and he found that he had been rubbing the hurt place so it bled afresh.

Below on the stairs sounded footsteps. Christopher gave an unsteady laugh. "Damn him! he hath given me one fright to pay me," he said, in a voice that caught in his throat. He pitched across the room toward the door. There was a throbbing in his temples, and his lips twitched; he realized, unashamed, that he was ready to fall on Calderwood's neck.

The key rattled in the lock; the door clattered open. On the threshold stood the Constable Gleason, and behind him Amariah Soper. "Come, Kester," spoke the Constable, "they're waiting for ye in the market place."

CHAPTER XVII

WHEREIN MEADOWCREEK DIVERTS ITSELF WITH CHRISTOPHER

OUT-OF-DOORS all dazzled, even to blinding him — the brazen sky above, the glaring segments of blue harbor that started into sight between the cottages, the glowing yellow sand of the market place. There black shapes moved — men and women, he realized, as he blinked one hesitating instant in the Constable's doorway. They were watching, the very windows of the cottages were peering upon him. A shrill boy's voice raised a cry at sight of him; he felt the whole throng turn toward him.

Christopher thrust up his chin a degree higher than usual, and, with a desperate nerving of his whole quivering body, swaggered out through the gate.

"Stiff-necked as ever!" he heard one say, and then the voice of Goodwife Pritchard: "Ay, ay, there's never an ounce of decent shame in him, the vile runagate!"

"Well, are ye there, Dorcas?" He swung round upon her with a hackly laugh that tore his throat. "'Sfoot! where's your goodman? Is a' sobered yet?"

Some ill-conditioned body fell a-laughing at the worthy matron; the youngsters, dodging about in the crowd, laughed, too, for company's sake. One, a small Mawry, with his stockings in tatters, darted before the officers, and, walking backward, tried to get a good look at the prisoner's face. Soper gave the lad a push that tumbled him over into the sand.

Christopher swung the little fellow to his feet: "Be in no such haste, brother; you'll have good opportunity to stare me

out o' countenance ere sunset. Run home to your mother and bid her dust you off. Eh? She's here? Give ye good day, Goodwife Mawry. A word in your ear, son: she'd better be home, mending of your stockings." He fetched the lad a clap on the shoulder that sent him scudding away.

Then an instant the rush of words near failed him, as he found himself alongside of the stocks, and heard the Constable order him to sit down. "I want the softest end o' the seat, if it like you, sir," he recovered his tongue; and made a show of testing with his hand the log that served for bench.

"Try the end nighest the whipping-post," grinned Govis.

"'Sblood! ye must have been here yourself," cried Christopher. "I'm a prentice at the trade, Seth." He set himself down, as he spoke, and swung up his legs so his ankles rested in the notches of the lower beam of the stocks. Soper dropped the upper beam into place with a crash that jarred through Christopher's body, and, fastening the padlock that joined the beams, handed the key to the Constable. "Tidy arrangement, isn't not?" grinned Christopher. "You're sure to find me here when you come back."

"Yes," said the Constable, as he dropped the key into his pocket. "And I'm thinking I'll find ye talking less."

The laugh that rose now was at him, Christopher felt. His fingers clutched tensely at the squared edge of the log on which he sat, but he flung out his voice: "Well, if the rest of you keep silence, Gleason! Come, come, step up, good folk, have a look, and say what ye've come to say. You there, Winlock Presgrave, how like you of the sight? Do not hang your head, man, come up, come up!"

"You'd better give the time of your chastisement to pious meditation," spoke a resonant voice at his elbow.

Christopher flashed a look up into the face of Soper, who stood guard over him. Like a tormented stag, he turned to gore this new hound: "I could count on you, suresby! Remember the first time we met, Amariah? And the wine I

gave ye to drink? Savored well, didn't it? Wine and sand and your blood mixed in. Why, you cursed empty barrel o' words, that is fit only to cuff little boys that whisper in meeting or stand guard over a fellow whose heels are fast, you —"

"If you don't hold your tongue," threatened the irate Tithingman, "you'll be gagged."

"Ah, don't you try it!" scoffed Christopher. "God pity the man gets his fingers near my teeth this day!"

The crowd was shifting, he realized; the same staring faces were not always in his eyes. There was passing and repassing to the meeting-house, and now, in the midst of his high-pitched utterance, he saw that Benjie Trescott stood before him. His hair was smooth and his bands spotless; he held a folio volume under his arm, and he spoke measuredly, as if he were in the pulpit: "I be grieved to see you here, Christopher Ferringham."

"The same to you, sir."

"You see now the end to which your vices have dragged you; you have received the hire of your lewdness. Make it to your soul's profit. Experience doth show —"

"Ah, for the Lord's love send this sucking parson home!" Christopher derided. "You white-livered young fool, go learn to kiss a wench and to strike a man fairly, strike him when he stands o' two feet and hath his two hands to hit back, ere ye come schooling o' me."

"Let him alone, Benjamin; he'll go his own path to destruction," interrupted Elder Jeanison, and himself turned to quit the scene.

Christopher's eyes darted after him, and, with a sudden leaping of the blood in his temples, he spied Nathan Calderwood walking across the market place. He went at a grave pace, with thoughts, to all appearance, set on the meeting-house, and he looked neither to right nor left. "Calderwood, hey, Calderwood!" Christopher's voice shrilled; he heard the amazed indrawing of the breath with which the scoffing crowd about

him became silent. "D'ye think 'tis civil to pay no heed to a kinsman? 'Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, looked on him and passed by on the other side.' Good Scripture, eh?"

Challenged thus, Calderwood had paused some twenty paces off, and eyed him squarely. "It's a sight to gladden the breast of the elect, is't not?" laughed Christopher. "You couldn't find a worse sinner than a drunkard and a gamester, could you? I could find you a worse, Master Calderwood. What say you to a man makes promises but to smash them, who lies — 'And the liars shall have a part in the lake that burneth' —"

"You have vices enough of your own to scan without meddling amongst those of others," Calderwood answered, in the passionless voice that Christopher had heard so many times. He turned away to the meeting-house; the few women who yet lingered, the more substantial men, followed after him. A little time yet some rougher youths and the curious small boys stood gaping, while Christopher gibed at whatever name or person came first to mind. But the hour for the lecture drew on, so reluctantly the last of them all must lag away; even Soper, after a final look to see that the padlock was firm, made one of the train, and Christopher found himself alone.

The hard grin left his set face. With a half-audible gasp he let his erect head droop down on his breast and unclenched his hands. His fingers, where he had clutched the bench, were stiff. A time he sat motionless in mere dull relief at his solitude. From the meeting-house droned the voice of Master Trescott, but it would be an hour ere the lecture was done. "And then my time'll be near half out," he muttered, and involuntarily made a movement to shift his position. The merciless frame vised him fast.

Straightway, now that he realized that he could not move, the desire to move grew stronger in him. His shoulders ached dully, he became aware, and he found there was no support to relieve them; he could rest his back only by slouching down with one elbow on the bench. A time he sat thus, and took

note of the stray shoots of grass and the one gleaming dandelion that thrust up about the stocks.

Then he found that his legs were aching, dully, persistently; the strain under the kneecaps was above all relentless. He straightened up, with the sharp pains shooting through the side that had been bent by his reclining position. "I knew not — the stocks did hurt," he groaned, and he looked eagerly down the bare street in hope to see the shadows lengthening on the sand. But the lecture hour was not yet half out. The sun was almost plumb above him and so hot that his bare head throbbed. A very little wind was abroad, but, coming from the western woods, it was stiflingly warm. Still, he could smell in it a tang of the pines, and, shutting his dazzled eyes, he tried to dream the trees were over him and the blessed peace of the forest locked him round.

A scuffling sound in the sand roused him. From Atherton's house-yard he saw a file of geese come waddling — the first moving thing that, since the lecture hour, had stepped upon the street. They shuffled, voluble, across the market place; their beaks clattered, as they snapped up each blade of grass. The little green that sprouted about the stocks allured them. Thither they paddled, under the lead of a gander with shimmery green head. But a few paces off they paused, resentful of the intruder. "I shan't get up to fright you away," apologized Christopher. "I could an I wanted to, but I'm too good-natured."

Unplacated, the gander stretched forth his quivering neck and hissed sibilantly; then, with a flap of the wings, led his clacking company away. "Even the very geese," muttered Christopher.

His voice came huskily; between the dust and the heat he felt himself half choked. In the Constable's dooryard was a well, the sweep and curb of which were in his line of vision. Persistently his eyes strayed thither while he gulped at the dryness that spread through his throat. An absurd hope

started in him once, when a stout serving-maid came forth of the house and stepped to the well, but he knew better than to ask mercy of any in Meadowcreek.

Yet he watched longingly as she lowered the bucket. He could not hear the cool splash with which it struck the water, but he heard the creak of the sweep as it drew up the bucket, and he saw, as the maid bore it into the house, how the water slopped over upon the dirt. And his throat was shrivelling with thirst! He ground his sweaty forehead between his hands; the voices in the meeting-house now were raised in a psalm, but Christopher, with cracking lips, cursed softly.

A twinge of pain made him fling up his head. Stiff as he was with his forced posture, cramps had laid hold on the muscles of his legs. With teeth locked and lips writhing, he fought the agony as he could. Only to get his ankles free one instant till he was bettered! And the merciless heat still poured upon his head, and his throat was clogged with dust. He slid down so he rested one side on the bench, and in the very ecstasy of the multiplied pain found a stupor-like relief.

Within the meeting-house sounded now the scuffle of feet. Clenching his teeth, Christopher forced himself erect again, shoulders back, mouth set, and strove to call to mind a first sentence of impudent defiance with which to greet his tormentors. His brain seemed dazed; no words came, only the prayer that was almost spoken on his lips: "If the lecture would last—I would they left me alone!"

But the vanguard of noisy youths was already leaping and clattering down the meeting-house steps; behind them tramped the graver folk; there was a white gleam of women's starched kerchiefs against the dark mass of the men's doublets. Idly the different knots of people drew toward the centre of the market place; he felt the sneer upon each hostile face, and he launched into shrill counter-vituperation: "Back again, Soper? Lord bless thy merry face! I've not missed you, man. 'Had a noble proxy in your stead—Atherton's wise gray gander."

Daniel Mawry laughed thereat; the Tithingman was no favorite of the more boisterous spirits, and those were the ones whom, for their likelihood to give him something more than grave preachments, Christopher sensed that he had most need to placate. "Look you, Daniel, didst ever hear how Amariah Soper went to arrest the two sailors who were tippling down toward Romney Marsh?" he cried recklessly. It was a vile tale, but droll; he shouted it out unsparingly.

"Hold your tongue!" bellowed Soper.

"Let him talk, let him talk. 'Tis good custom," chuckled Thomas Naylor, while more than one woman clapped her hands to her ears and scudded home, with a last shrill outcry that the Kestrel was black to the very soul of him.

At such juncture Master Trescott, with Moses Atherton and a staid gentleman whom Christopher remembered vaguely as a Boston citizen of worth, came into the market place. The uproarious laughter died down; even the Kestrel's shameless tongue was for an instant silent.

"You will not run from my counsel this time, sirrah," spoke Trescott, halting over against the stocks.

"'Sblood! no, sir. Pity you cannot fix your congregation thus every Lord's Day. 'Sbody! none ever stayed o' free will."

Trescott's voice, raised sharply, overbore his speech. For a quarter of an hour the minister relentlessly poured forth a summary of Christopher's vices, denounced the inevitable judgment which he would yet pull upon himself, and ended by admonishing him to bear his punishment patiently; if it served to break his spirit, he might yet bless the day he was made to sit there.

Cramped and aching, Christopher listened perforce, but his eyes watched the black rim of shadow that was cast by the Constable's buildings. From far down the street he saw a flight of pigeons with shimmery wings come fluttering and perch upon the summit of the meeting-house.

"Are you attending?" Trescott asked.

"Devil a word, sir."

"Who is this shameless knave?" questioned the Boston man.

"You'd best let me tell, sir. Parson is like to botch the story," Christopher began fleeringly, when a bluff voice close at hand struck in, "Your pardon, sir; Master Ferringham is no knave, but a gentleman." It was Captain Enoch, who stood with his hat thrust back from his forehead and his legs wide, the picture of a good fellow. "'Tis a droll place your gentle blood hath set you in, Ferringham," he said, with a hearty laugh that the men about him caught up.

"Only one step from the whipping-post, too," Christopher answered, with vicious directness. "'Struth! you were near as sure of my gentry that night as you be now. 'You're a gentleman, Ferringham; you must help me,'—d'ye recall? 'Twas when your old sailor, Killion, that you compassionate, was wanting to gouge your eyes, and Joan, she—"

"Do na you miscall a decent woman, you whoreson!" screamed Trull's wife.

"Ay, you're here too," mocked Christopher. "Why don't you stand over beside her, Enoch? 'Sdeath and 'swounds! you've been nearer to her ere now, you wittol-maker, you—"

The words rattled off in his throat. Over the shoulders of the crowd, as he faced Captain Gleason, he saw entering the market place a slight girl's figure, the likeness of which to one that he knew made the heart stand still within him. Nan's new gray frock, Nan's hood, and underneath, across the glaring market place and the mocking crowd, Nan's brown eyes met his.

His shoulders sank and his arm flew up, as if to ward a physical blow. There was a ringing in his ears, a burning in his cheeks; he heard Raham Mawry's voice scoff, "That's rare! I never thought yonder rakehell had in him the grace to blush."

He forced down his arm, and, with the blood still like fire in his face, looked straight before him. The jeering laughter that had started at his expense half dwindled. "Be quiet, the pack of you!" came Abigail Naylor's voice at the outskirts of the crowd. "The poor lass!"

"Nay, and serve her right! A country-bred man was not good enough for her!" cried Goodwife Pritchard.

They all were gazing on the girl; it did no harm though he looked thither too. Despairingly he turned his head a little. She was halfway across the market place; her shoulders were rigid, her eyes were fixed before her, her cheeks were grayish white. She had not turned to look on him, she had not paused nor swerved for him. The sunlight on the sand wavered before his eyes, and his throat filled almost to choking him; he fumbled with one hand and unfastened his doublet.

"A worthy, sober fellow to seek the favor of a decent woman," Enoch was drawling. "You, with your life as foul as — well, as your shirt."

The idlers snickered again, but Christopher made no answer, nor so much as looked at them. He was sitting listless, with head bowed and hands clenched between his knees. Mechanically he noted the blunted leaves and the golden pollen of the dandelion that grew beneath the stocks. About him the loungers jested, scoffed, said what they would to him; he clenched his underlip between his teeth and sat silent.

The crowd had lessened somewhat; fewer voices vexed him, though Enoch Gleason was faithful at his post. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the line of shadow reached farther into the market place; some moment perhaps it would end, and somewhere he could hide his head.

He felt a smart clap on the shoulder; he looked up dazedly, and above him Dearmont Killion, with one foot upon the bench, peered down into his face. "D'ye mind, Kester," he grinned, "'twould ha' profited you had you struck gentler one or two times you know of."

Within his head something seemed to snap. "Dearmont." He ground his clenched fist into his other open palm. "I'm not to sit here for your sport for all time. And when I come free, God's light! I'll put a mark on you, I'll be the death of you —"

Dearmont gave a yell of laughter. "Try it!" he shouted. "You're no gentleman now to buffet as you please. Lift your hand against me or any of your betters, and see how the Constable will handle you. He's your master, he and Captain Enoch yonder. And there's a whipping-post for serving-fellows who go to fisticuffs."

Christopher rubbed his hand across his wet forehead where the disorderly forelock lay damp, and uttered no word. Dearmont ran on; his late comrade's escapades came pat to his tongue since his testimony in court, and he elaborated for the benefit of Meadowcreek, which commented and found the tale good. "'You fetch us the aqua vitæ, Dearmont,' says he," explained Killion. "'Have no fear. I can shield ye. Did ye ever know a gentleman come to harm? Even wi' starched Puritans like the Meadowcreek cullions —'"

"Come, come, march out o' this!" the Constable's voice broke in. "Are you so in love with the stocks you must stand in them before your time, Killion?" He came leisurely through the sand behind the bench, and, tossing Soper the key, stood looking curiously at Christopher. "I told you you'd be wearied o' talking," he said.

Without so much as glancing at him, Christopher swung himself clear of the stocks and sat with eyes downcast. The keen pains that the sudden change of position set rioting in his legs, in his stiffening knees, made him blink and draw his brows together. With a last nerving of his body, he gathered strength and brought himself squarely to his feet at one movement; but his knees knocked together, his numbed legs shook beneath him, and he reeled like a man in liquor. Gleason caught him by the elbow. "Take hold of his other arm, Enoch," he ordered.

"I remember," quoth the Captain, as Christopher stumbled across the market place between them, "some months ago Master Ferringham was very busied in doing me good offices at such a time."

Still, strength or spirit was not in him to wrench out of Enoch's hold. Haltingly he limped into the house-yard, into the Constable's kitchen. "Well," Jane Gleason greeted him, "I'm blithe to see you come back in a humbler spirit than you went out."

He had thought perhaps he might ask for a drink, but now he turned in silence and dragged himself up the stairs at the Constable's heels. At least the hidden corner that he had prayed for was at last to be his. He flung himself in at the door which Gleason held open, into his old prison. "There's bread and water," the Constable spoke. "If weariness does it, you'll sleep sound to-night, Kester."

The door closed behind him; the bolt shot into the socket. An instant Christopher wavered where he stood. The pallet looked immeasurably far away. Below in the kitchen Enoch and Enoch's mother would be glad of any sound that betrayed his weakness; with a last effort of the tortured muscles he kept himself from falling full length on the floor, but knelt slowly, and noiselessly stretched himself out.

The moment had come for which he had lived those hours of torment. He was free to shift his feet, to bend his cramped legs, to straighten his aching back as he pleased. There was never a jeering face to meet his, never a mocking voice to fall upon his ear. Outside a bird was singing its evening strain, and the light paled in the chamber. He stared up into the dim roof above him, and for an instant lay dulled and stupid.

Only an instant. For the faces were there—the sneer of the man who scorned him for a sinner, of the man who hated him for his gay coat—Trescott, Killion, Enoch Gleason, Pritchard's goodwife—all gibbered and mowed before him, and against such background of hatred he saw a white face

with eyes that looked through him—Nan's face. And he saw himself, unkempt and bemired, with blasphemy and ribaldry on his tongue, as he sat there in the shameful stocks, the butt of them all, before her eyes. "God, God!" gasped the Kestrel, with something that went nearer to prayer than oath. He felt the tears scalding against his close-shut eyelids, the sob tearing in his aching throat. He writhed over on his face, and bit hard upon his doublet sleeve.

CHAPTER XVIII

BELOW THE SALT

LEVEL with his eyes a patch of sunlight lay upon the splintery boards, just where the wall made an angle with the dusty floor. He wondered why he was outstretched there upon the planking, why his eyeballs smarted and his head felt clogged; then, as there came again the clatter of the bolt that must have roused him, he remembered.

The door creaked, and he turned his head a little so his disfigured face was hidden against his arm. Right above him spoke Gershom Field's voice: "Rouse up. No shamming now. Rouse up, d'ye hear?" On the word there sounded a *flap* as of loose cloth striking on the floor. "The master says you're to shift into these clothes, briskly too, and come to him at the smithy. D'ye hear?"

"Tell him I'll come," Christopher dragged out the words.

After Gershom had grumbled himself out at the door, he made an effort, for he ached still in every fibre of him, and pulled himself up sitting. On the floor beside him sprawled the clothes the Constable had sent him — leather breeches, kenting shirt, fustian jacket, such as any serving-fellow would wear. Christopher dropped one arm upon his bent knee and laid his head upon it. In the stable-yard below he heard the stamp of cattle and the bark of a dog, and in the village street sounded the cow-keeper's horn. Yonder was Meadowcreek, that he must go forth and face to-day, every day, in his visible ignominy.

But there was no resisting; not only had he the Constable

to reckon with, but behind the Constable was Meadowcreek, and behind that the whole Commonwealth of the Bay. So with unsteady fingers Christopher adjusted himself to the leather breeches and the coarse shirt, while he wondered if they were cast garments of Gershom Field's, or perchance of Captain Enoch's.

As he lagged across the passageway to the stairhead, the clatter of pans and the shrill voice of Goodwife Gleason reached him. There were the merciless eyes of the women to encounter, and he made no doubt but his face showed that he had wept. He dropped his chin into the hollow of his neck, and, with one hand pressed hard against the wall, slouched down the stairs into the kitchen. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a woman's skirt flutter from the hearth to the table; he heard Jane Gleason's swift sneer at the time he had been deciding to do as he was bidden, heard the obsequious laugh of the serving-wench.

Then he was clear of them, out on the doorstone in the flooding sunlight, and yonder was the well with a full bucket poised on the curb. Limping thither, he splashed the water over his head and shoulders; his face was clean, at any rate, he reflected, as he scrubbed his sleeve across his dripping forehead, and more than that, the cold douche had heartened him a little. A first flutter of anything like hope stirred in him; there were the free woods whither Crozier had fled, and in few days he would have back his strength.

In such thought he halted on the threshold of the narrow side-door of the smithy. Within was summer brightness from the main doors that opened on the street and the small window over the workbench, through which glimmered the sunny branches of a neighboring orchard. By the forge, where the coals were yet black, stood the Constable; his doublet was off, and he was leisurely turning back his shirt-sleeves. Christopher took note of the swelling muscles of his bared arms; he was a strong man—perhaps stronger than he at the best of

times, and that morning Christopher was conscious that he was as limp as a string. "You sent for me?" he blurted out.

"Yes," answered Gleason, and a moment let his eyes range over Christopher's disconsolate figure. A flash of amusement crossed his face, and Christopher, gnawing at his nether lip, hated the man. "I wanted you to know at the outset how we stand. Come in hither." With a gesture he bade Christopher into the smithy, and himself leaned, half sitting, against the forge. "Michael Gamlyn did not hanker after your services, so I quitted your debt to him and bought the whole of your time. That makes some twelve pound you're owing me now, and at unskilled laborer's wage it's hard on ten months you have to serve."

"Tell me what I have to do, and let me go about it," Christopher interrupted in his driest voice.

Gleason reached down one hand at the farther side of the forge and, taking something that hung there, dropped it clanking on the floor. In the tangle of chain and iron ring Christopher made out a grim pair of fetters; he shied like a frightened horse. "Do you mean to put those things on me?"

"Either that, or you must give me your parole not to go outside the Meadowcreek bounds."

An instant Christopher stared hopelessly at his master's unruffled face, then his eyes dropped to the floor where the fetters lay, and travelled thence to his ankles.

"To be sure, I'd liefer not set you in the bolts," the Constable went on. "A man so fitted cannot labor the half as well. I'd have to find you chares to do about the stable and the smithy here—"

"Doing your chares, in irons, in the face of the village?" gulped Christopher. "Damn you!" As the word slid off his tongue he was conscious of a sudden empty feeling, of a nervous pounding of the blood in his temples; he was afraid, he realized with dull misery, afraid of Gleason, afraid of what

humiliating penance his foolhardy speech might pull upon him.

He looked up, after an instant, with a cowed effort to bring the defiance back into his bearing. "Well?" Gleason questioned, as if he had not heard him.

"I give my parole," Christopher promised sullenly. "So long as you don't put me in irons, I won't try to run away."

"I'll set you to work in the fields, then," the other answered. "You can handle a spade, eh? And I'm thinking you know very well the way to my upper cornland. There's a tract of rough land to northward of it where the trees are just down, that must be spaded. You can fall to't there."

Christopher snatched the spade that was proffered him and turned away. "Go eat your breakfast first," bade Gleason. "Get a cap, too. The sun will be hot."

"I'm not hungry; I want no cap," snapped Christopher. He stuck the spade under his arm at an awkward angle, as if it were a fowling-piece, and slouched forth into the house-yard. With a weary movement of one knee, he thrust open the gate into the fields, kicked it to viciously, and fagged off down the path.

The Constable Gleason, from the smithy-door, stood watching him go, while the quizzical expression deepened about his eyes. Just there Captain Enoch, coming from the house, sauntered up to him, and, his glance following his father's, gave a start. "You've let that halter-sack go forth to order himself, sir? Then it's farewell twelve pounds! He'll never show his face here again. Parole? What's a parole to the Kestrel? Hasn't he deceived his kin the last ten weeks with his stage-play of reformation? A' is liar to the core. Had I the breaking in of such a blade, I'd—"

"Enoch," said the Constable patiently, "ten year ago, when you were still being birched i' the school, I was sergeant in Skippon's foot and handling more men than you've ever had aboard your little ship. And if I'd had the handling of you

those years, my lad, you'd be a very different man now." With which the Constable went back into his forge. Enoch did not go with him; he had derived from his mother such gentility, the Constable, in one moment of domestic stress, had blurted out to Calderwood, that his yeoman father's craft was beneath him.

Meantime the Kestrel, stumbling with downbent head, had brought himself to the new land northward of the cornfield, where he fell to digging. He worked with no plan; one spade-ful followed another as chance willed, but he worked, and the fierce weariness dulled his smarting senses. The sun mounted higher, so his head ached relentlessly; the dry smell of the baked earth stifled him; his shirt clung to his dripping shoulders. He wondered if ever a man died of the steady pain of an overstrained back and smarting hands. But he toiled on, with the reddish earth wavering before his dulled eyes, till the shadows lengthened and the sun sank.

When he dragged himself into the Constable's yard, it was black evening. Supper would be over, he realized, with something shadowily like relief; the humiliation of taking his place at the lower end of Gleason's table among the serving-folk was deferred yet a time. That it would not be always deferred meant nothing to him; he was living but from one miserable hour to the next. Goodwife Gleason was vociferous on the subject of rogues who held themselves such gentlemen they could overturn all order in a house, but none the less he got à piece of bread, and, gnawing at it with the hunger of eight and forty hours' fast, he stumbled away to his pallet.

It was, however, his last avoidance of the table. When he was for slipping out to his work in the early sunrise of next morning, Gleason stayed him peremptorily: "Sit down and eat your breakfast like a Christian. Sit down, I say." Sullenly, Christopher obeyed; he ate his three meals a day thereafter, sitting on the form beside Gershom Field, under the pitiless eyes of Captain Enoch and of Jane Gleason. It was she who

served the food, and Christopher took dull note that the scantiest helping of the porridge and the scraggiest end of the meat fell to his share.

Only once more did he strive to assert a will of his own. In the next glaring morning, a Lord's Day, he rose with the feeling that he could not show himself in his sorry garments in the meeting-house, before all Meadowcreek. "I shan't go to meeting," he made blunt answer to the Constable's command.

"That's as you please, Kester," the other replied. "But I'll pay no five shillings that you may sit idle at home. If you stay from meeting, your body will have to answer it. Go brush the mire off those clothes of your own, now, and go decently."

"These clothes like me well enough," said Christopher. A fierce delight in draining his cup to the dregs came on him. Jamming over his eyes the sorriest cap he could find, he strode out into the market place, where he halted and took a good look at the stocks; then went on, fronting pious sneer with sneer, to find his seat in the meeting-house on the bench with other servants. He looked with steady defiance at Calderwood in the deacons' place; he was bearing even the worst they could put on him, and at that moment the very excess of misery had brought him to the numbed point where it seemed little.

But that repressed mood was only transient; before the end of the week which he began so haughtily, scant fare, furious labor, and the smarting sense of his degradation wrought him to such a state of body and mind that the inevitable outburst came. Even the poor comfort of solitary labor had been taken from him, for the time was ripe for planting the house-garden behind the orchard, and an extra pair of hands was needed at the task, so the Constable put Christopher to work alongside of Gershom Field. This, to Gershom, meant license to bully the Kestrel, and a pretext was not far to seek. Unquestion-

ably Christopher was awkward; he had his own swift, back-handed way of attacking unfamiliar labor which formerly had been a trial to old Bray Williams. Bray had remonstrated, feelingly but respectfully, for the young man was his master's nephew, but Gershom Field was under no restraint. Frankly and frequently he gave Christopher to know that he was an awkward fool, that he wasn't there to dawdle about his work as if he were a gentleman, and much more to the same end, till at last, one blazing afternoon, the tormented Kestrel rose from his bent and aching knees with an ominous pulse throbbing in his white cheeks. "Gershom," he said in a piteous voice, "I'm working, I'm working well as I can and fast as I can. And, Gershom, if you utter another word to me this day I—I'll strangle you."

The master'd see to that, blustered Field, and stalked away across the garden toward the Constable's house. Christopher knelt again and strove to work, but his hands shook. For he had no illusions on the score of Gershom Field; the fellow would bear tales straight to the Constable, and he made no doubt but he would suffer for his threatening.

He was near the end of the row of onions which he was setting, and there, just across the trail, the scrubby underbrush and close trees of the uncleared hill-slope began. One last glance Christopher cast behind him; then he rose to his feet and, bending double, darted across the trail. Ever thicker, the bushes flew into place behind him, with a crackling and snapping that seemed to him the uproar of pursuit. Not till the safe forest to northward cast its shade about him, did the panic terror quit him, and even then he pressed on at a round pace into the woods. He had no definite plan; but at least in the forest the sun no longer scorched him, nor did any gibing voice grate on his ear. The dusky pines shut out the sky, and even the call of the birds was subdued.

Of a sudden the crackle of a footstep made him fling up his head, with thought of Gleason and recapture; next instant he

found himself steadied again to sanity, for down the path that skirted the thicket which he was threading, came young Jack Calderwood. He sprang along, black head erect and a snatch of whistled song on his lips, and in his hand he swung something heavy tied in a napkin.

Christopher stepped into the path. "Give you good day, Jackanapes," he said, with a jangling approach to his old manner.

It did his heart good to see the delight that flashed into the lad's face, though his speech was boyish and unemotional: "Have you given 'em the slip, cousin?"

"Nay, I was just walking. 'Slife! I never hurt myself with doing Matt Gleason's work," Christopher lied, and then, with a wistful glance at the napkin, "What have you there, Jack?"

"A mutton-pie. Yes, 'tis for you."

In a single breath Christopher secured the napkin, and, plunging in under the close-grown pines, flung himself down and ate, with a ravenousness that made the boy open round eyes of wonder. "Faith! they must ha' nigh starved you."

"I'd never suffer that. But the food is not home food."

"Mother said you'd weary o' Jane Gleason's cooking. She bade me slip across the fields and give't you."

Three-quarters through the pie, Christopher halted. It was food from Calderwood's house, he remembered; but the cooking was Elizabeth's, bless her! He fell to again, and paused not till the pie was eaten. He devoured even the crust—he was beyond his old daintiness—and ended by picking up the stray crumbs on the front of his shirt. He lay back then, under the rustling pine boughs, with his tired shoulders at ease and his smarting hands beneath his head, and for the first time he took full note of his young companion. The boy sat opposite him, cross-legged, with a stick in his hand, and he was whittling it with an ivory-handled knife. Christopher waited a time, and looked away from him as he asked, "How came you by that brave tool, Jack?"

"Nan gave't me," the boy smiled. "She brought it with her from Aquidnay, and she said she had no use for't, I might have it. Such fortunes as she's seen! You must know the pinnacle she went in from Boston was cast away to southward on Aquidnay shores. Wasn't that a rare hap? And she but a girl, while I am kept ever at home! Well, she said 'twas the Lord's hand in it, and it meant she should put back to Boston. So she came in a pink was bound for the Bay, and Goodman Torrey of Romney Marsh was in the town and fetched her on his horse far as he went, and then she walked on unto Meadowcreek. Are you sleeping, Christopher?"

"No," the Kestrel answered in a low voice; he had turned over and was lying with his face buried in his arms.

"Well, you should 'a' seen Nan when she came in that afternoon. I would not she should rate me as she rated my father—think on't! She said that he should take shame to himself that he suffered you be so handled, that 'twas cruel and wicked, whatever you had done, and much more I do not remember. And then of a sudden she cast her arms about his neck and burst out crying and said, 'Forgive me.' And she ran away into her chamber and bolted the door, and would not open it that night. Lucy had to sleep in the parlor. She's a droll girl, our Nan; I do not understand her now. She says she never wishes to hear speak of you, and she is sewing like mad. She says there must be sheets and fine napkins 'gainst Lucy's marrying Benjie Trescott, come autumn."

For a moment there was no sound, save the stir of the pine branches, then Jack reached out his arm and slightly shook his cousin. "Wake up, Christopher. What message am I to bear home?"

Christopher sat up slowly. "Yes, I was nigh asleep," he said, with a down look. "Why, no message, Jack, my boy, only to thank your mother, thank her a deal, Jack, tell her she's the best woman God ever made. But, Jack, tell her never send me aught again; I can't take what comes from

your father's house. You mustn't come to me again, either, lad." They had risen, and Christopher put his arm round his young cousin. "That's all, Jack. Wait, though," he added, in a stubbornly matter-of-fact tone. "Some time when you come unto the village, will you fetch me my razor and my shirts? I'm going to wear my own clothes o' Sunday."

He went back to the house of his bondage with a more assured step than he had come forth. After all, a shred of self-respect was left him; he had refused the comfort which Calderwood's wife stood ready to give him, and he had not broken his parole. With a rush of contempt for a bond-servant's trickery, he would not return to the house through the fields as if he had worked, but walked aggressively down the highway.

In such exalted mood, where possible punishment for his escapade was something to despise, the Constable Gleason's reception of him was humiliating. "Did you have a good run, Kester?" he greeted his fugitive servant, and when Christopher gave him a sullen "Yes, sir," only added, "Now you'd best stick to your task hereafter."

Indeed, Christopher had no thought to do otherwise; hard work made him sleep sound and forget, and made his muscles ache with varied pangs that took his mind from the mental smart. This was not labor such as he had done on his uncle's land, where at will he had left the plough in the middle of the furrow; here he kept at it grimly, and soon, with constant spading and chopping, his hands were sore. All the right palm became one great blister, till at last, impatient, Christopher tore it out and, after squirming a moment with the exquisite agony, went on with his work.

One bitter comfort he had in that period. Toward the close of May election fell, and when the ballots were counted, the news soon ran that Calderwood had lost his magistracy. "And 'tis along of you," Jane Gleason gave Christopher to know. "Since he harbored such a firebrand in his own house, they

have turned him out of office. 'Tis a sorrow unto all Meadowcreek. And never a grain of contrition in you. You look as you were rejoiced."

"Then Meadowcreek hath not made a hypocrite of me yet," he answered.

But by next day even—a judgment of Heaven, Goodwife Gleason called it later,—he had a further trouble of his own to busy him. For the mere plucking forth of the blister had not relieved his hand; rather, the raw palm, quite untended and tortured by the ceaseless pressure of axe-handle or of spade, grew worse, till it was all a running sore. A time he struggled with it in secrecy; he used his left hand at table, and made desperate shift with his tools. Gershom rated him for his awkwardness more bitterly than he had ventured to do since the afternoon in the garden, and at length must have complained to the Constable.

For one June day, while Christopher and Gershom and Trull, who was subdued in demeanor to the rest of the world, but very ready to give the dejected Kestrel a flick on the raw, were mowing in the hot meadow, Gleason came by. He stood over against Christopher, who under the steady glance lost control of his scythe and bungled the work more than usual; then stepped up to him: "What's wrong with you? Show me your hands."

"I'm well enough," Christopher growled, but Gleason gripped his wrist and forced his right hand, palm upward, from the snath. "That's a pretty-looking fist," he said disgustedly. "Have you no wit at all, you fool, to use yourself so? Take your scythe and go back to the house."

Christopher flung away, only too conscious of the guffaws which Trull and Field had at his thin-skinned weakness. Gleason, following leisurely, made him go into the kitchen, where he washed and tied up the sore hand with the same impersonal care with which he had formerly dressed the wound in Christopher's arm. "You've as pretty a knack of cutting

yourself to pieces as a half-broken colt," he commented. "Don't put that hand to any work now till I bid you."

Perhaps no worse sentence than that of idleness could have been passed on Christopher. Without work he had nowhere to turn: the village street was barred to him, for, though his arch-tormentor, Killion, had gone away to Newbury, where the Captain had found him work, there were left in Meadowcreek godly folk enough whose comments even yet hurt. Upon the Constable's farm it was as bad: in the fields he stumbled on Gershom; in the house he found that Jane Gleason and the wench Bet, who echoed her mistress, had their opinion of long-legged fellows that lounged about the kitchen; and in the stable and the house-yard he was always encountering Enoch, who had a jovial fashion in those days of giving him news of Calderwood's household and of Nan.

To his own dull amazement Christopher found himself taking refuge in the smithy. It was a wet morning that he first went thither; a stinging cold rain, more like March than June, was pelting down, and his room was cold and the stable was cold and the kitchen was closed against him. As he shivered across the puddled yard, he noted through the side-door of the smithy the red, warm glow that flickered along the dingy floor, and half unwillingly he strayed thither.

The Constable, with one hand on the lever, was blowing the bellows, but, as the windy roar died down, he seemed to become aware of Christopher's presence, for he looked up quickly: "Any errand hither?"

"No, sir," said Christopher, and stepped off the threshold again.

"Come in, if ye will," Gleason bade gruffly.

The doors upon the road were closed, so no chance idlers were likely to stray in. Christopher hesitated into the smithy and set himself astride the form near the glowing forge. It flashed over him how months before he had come swaggering into the shop to mock Gleason with his apologies; he won-

dered, heart-sickly, if Gleason, too, remembered it, but the Constable threw him no word.

Thankful for such negative indulgence, Christopher loitered thither again and yet again; it distracted him a little to watch Gleason's deft manipulation of the tools. He began to ask infrequent questions about the work, understanding questions, too, that made Gleason look up at him with new interest. "A man doth not ride for months in a horse-troop without learning something of farriery," Christopher answered the look. Gunsmithing was even more to his mind, and once when Gleason was mending a fowling-piece, he left the form and stood by the workbench to watch him. Gleason dropped his pliers to the floor, and, forgetting for the moment that the Constable was other than a man old enough to be his father, Christopher stooped and picked them up.

But Gleason was not every day in his shop or even on his farm, and in the hours when he was absent Enoch had his turn with the Kestrel. Though he was well assured that the fellow was malingering, he dared not set him to heavy labor while his father's positive prohibition stood, but, he sneered, to run of errands would not hurt Christopher's precious hand. He usually devised an errand, too, that would keep him away from the house over a mealtime, for now that his first agony of humiliation at taking a low seat at table was over, Christopher was as hungry for his scant rations as any normal youth of two and twenty.

One Court Day it chanced that just before supper Enoch sent him with a message to Winlock Presgrave's farm, at the farthest outskirts of Meadowcreek, so long a journey that it was well after eight of the clock when Christopher came back. He was ravenously hungry; there had been pork for dinner, the fattest lump of which had got into his trencher, and even starvation would not bring him to eat fat pork. So when he came into the kitchen where Bet was nodding alone by candlelight, he broke through his habit of taciturn endurance and asked for his supper.

Maybe he thought he was master in the house to call for his meals when he pleased, the wench snapped, and more to the same end, when the Constable, who must have come early from court, stepped out from the parlor. "What's amiss?" he asked sharply. "Give the lad his supper, do you hear?"

Bet made one angry bounce to the cupboard and another back to the table, on which she clapped down a porringer with a little stiff Indian porridge caked in the bottom. The Constable, standing grimly by, put the dish back into her hands. "Throw that to the hens; 'tis not fit for a Christian to eat."

Well, 'twas no blame of hers; she did but obey; the mistress bade her give't to the Kestrel —

"Hm!" said the Constable, and then, "Did you hear me bid you give him his supper, you hussy?"

At that Bet snivelled angrily. Maybe he wasn't too proud to eat *that* — she banged the platter of cold sturgeon down on the table — nor *that* — the loaf of bread followed — and she supposed he'd have to have beer. "Now hold your tongue!" Gleason said, whereat the girl put her apron over her head and boo-hoed in earnest. "Sit down," he bade Christopher, the first word he had addressed to him, and went back into the parlor.

Bet took the rejected porringer and wept herself out at the back door. The gust of her exit blew open the door into the parlor. Christopher, eating happily, — it was the first decent meal he had made since the mutton-pie, weeks before, — became aware that within Gleason was growling in bass to his wife's treble. Try as he would, he found himself following the Constable's words: "When he came into the house I said he wasn't to be cockered up and treated other than as any servant. But I didn't tell you he was to be used worse. The young fellow's half starved. Do you mark me, Jane? That's to end. I won't have a cat go empty in this house, let alone a man."

Christopher drained off the last of his beer, laid a slab of fish

on a hunch of bread, and very softly crept away up the stairs to his room. For the next few days he sheered away from the Constable's neighborhood; he might stand taunts and abuse—he was well hardened to them—but he was rawly resentful of anything that savored of kindness. He took to the fields, spite of the danger of chance encounters with the Meadow-creek folk, and one languid June day, when both the Constable and Enoch were from home, and by no hap could work be found for him, strayed into the woods.

The sky, between the feathery boughs, was a flawless blue that lured the eye upward into splendid distance; the least breeze winnowed the warm air and drew the clean scent from the pines and the dark recesses of the cedars. In the more open places, amid low bushes, the lilies blazed redly, and the low, wet lands were blue with flower-de-luce. With senses lulled to something like content, Christopher sauntered on till, with a shock of realization, he perceived he had taken familiar paths and was within Calderwood's land. He would turn back, he vowed with each step, yet he went on, through brakes and sumac and close growth of young birches, till he stood at the place whither, he reflected dully, he had all that afternoon been tending.

He stood beneath a clump of silver birches, and before him on the southern hill-slope spread a field of some four acres, all green with young blades of corn,—the field that was to have been his. About it now a rude fence was flung up; Christopher laid his arms along the topmost rail that shut him out, and stared upon the wavering green blades. It was down that field that Nan had trudged at his side; under those very birch trees he had swung the plough about.

Slowly he made his way through the bushes that lashed at his face, round by the edge of the field till he came to the laurel thicket. All beneath the green bushes now the Solomon's Seal was starting, as Nan had foretold, but the brook had dwindled to a mere thread of turbid water between bald

banks. He stared upon it, kicked a stone into the current, and started at the sullen splash.

In among the thickets he found the ledge of rock where they had sat that day. Long sprays of columbine with faint pink blossoms now crept over it, but beneath their tendrils sprawled blackberry vines that, as he cast himself down on the rock, tore his hand. He looked stupidly at the long scratch, and he looked down at his mean garments and his scarred hands. Last April was so long away!

The sun sank behind the trees, and he shivered in his sleeveless fustian jacket. The shadows began to thicken in the woods below him and to steal up the rock where he sat. Heavily he rose and went down into the bushes.

As he crept through the last of the underbrush that lay between him and the well-remembered by-way from Lastbrook, the sound of a footstep caught his ear. Dreading lest he come face to face with Calderwood, he shrank back behind a tree trunk. The rustling sound came nearer, and with it came the note of a man's voice, low in earnest protest. In the twilight of the roadway he made out two figures, then the clinging darkness of a woman's gown, the white of a kerchief, and, almost within arm's reach of him, he looked on Nan's face. She walked slowly, with head downbent, and at her side strode Enoch Gleason.

CHAPTER XIX

UP THE HILL AND DOWN AGAIN

"I've had enough of holidaying," Christopher went up to the Constable next morning. "I want to work. Please to give me work, hard work, I care not what."

Gleason answered that doubtless 'twould fit his half-healed hand rarely if he turned to and split a few score fence rails, — a careful sarcasm, which Christopher so persistently misconstrued that later, on entering the woodlot, the Constable found him with his hand unbandaged, hard at the labor. "You mere fool!" quoth Gleason. "Go sit in the smithy where I can have an eye to you."

Yet he was so far cognizant of the young man's crying need to be busied, that in the smithy he mercifully found him some tasks; though he had but one hand that was serviceable, Christopher could fetch water for the slake trough and feed the fire, shovelful by shovelful, and reach the smith the tools as they were needed. With such beginning Christopher found himself, as his hand mended, so insensibly that he scarcely realized the stages, fitting securely into the routine of the smithy. From mere building of fires he blew the bellows and did a striker's work, all to the edification of Meadowcreek, which suffered a revival of interest in him.

The male half of the village, with or without pretext, sauntered into the smithy to have a look at the scapegrace, in his new grimy guise of worker, but speedily the village faced about and marched out again. For the Constable was no more hospitable than usual to loiterers. "Run home to your

master, Nick," he bade the miller's man, Batter. "He'll find somewhat to busy you. You, Theophilus, you were in mischief once along with the Kestrel; sheer away from him now; a' hath no dice for you." Young Atherton, who had come in with a look of starched virtue, drooped his crest at this reminder of his own lapse and slipped away. The graver men of the community were not, of course, to be so dismissed; Christopher had to listen while Master Trescott told him he was glad to see him busy at honest labor, and he had to swallow some not over-acceptable jests from the Constable's crony, Raham Mawry. But on the whole, after the first week of amazement, Meadowcreek accepted him in his new rôle with surprising readiness.

Indeed, there were other matters than the humbling of Christopher Ferringham to draw men's minds in that summer of '53; war and rumors of war were in the air—with the Dutch of Manhattan, with the Indians to westward and on the eastern coast. There were hurried meetings of the Governor's Council, which filled the villages with uneasy wonder; men were enrolled, troops were mustered, powder and shot were looked to. With the rest of the warlike preparation, all the firearms in the country were overhauled, an activity that meant labor for every smith in the Bay. Gleason's forge was in blast almost daily, and Gleason himself, known for an excellent gunsmith, was so busy that, long before his time, he pressed Christopher into responsible service.

"You should be able to shoe a horse by now, if you've kept your eyes open these weeks," he said one morning, unexpectedly. "My mare is wanting a forward shoe. Fetch her hither and let me see you do the work."

Tib, the mare, was restive, as if she scented an inexperienced hand, but Christopher soothed her into good humor and at length fitted her shoe. There was little chance of his going wrong in the work, even had he observed the manner of it less closely, for the Constable stood at his elbow and watched each

movement. "You might ha' done worse," was his sole comment, but that noon he gave Christopher a pipeful of tobacco — the first smoke the young fellow had had in weeks.

Not only was Christopher sometimes suffered to shoe horses, under due supervision, thereafter, but Gleason taught him more of the craft, especially of the delicate art of mending broken firearms, and he taught him with careful patience. Outside, at the less frequent farm labor, and in the house, Christopher had sometimes still to wince at the Constable's contemptuous speech, but in the smithy, where he had slid tacitly into an apprentice's place, he was secure from taunt or jeer. Little by little he was won to the point where he no longer shied out at the door when Gleason spoke civilly to him; he even began to get back something of his old tones and gestures, and over the tobacco, which came to him pretty frequently, he exchanged with the Constable long tales of English campaigns. The sword scar on Christopher's bared arm first started the two men in that strain, and, with a hint here and a sentence there, Christopher, quite unconsciously, gave his master to know more of his neglected boyhood and haphazard upgrowing than he had confided to any in Meadowcreek.

Gleason smoked and listened, and watched his man. Never a hint had Christopher as to what went on in the Constable's mind till one day in mid-August, when as they sat smoking in the smithy, during the noon hour, the older man addressed him suddenly: "Kester, you hadn't touched strong waters that night you were apprehended."

"No, sir," admitted Christopher, and, because he judged Gleason would appreciate the story, told him of the drugging aboard the *Goodfellow*, and how since then he somehow had small relish for wine or rum.

"Well, what were ye doing in my canoe that night?" the Constable returned to the charge.

"Bobbing for eels, sir," Christopher replied, with that in his manner that robbed the words of their impudence.

Gleason, indeed, smiled as he put up his pipe. "Are you well assured you were not setting that runagate Scotch friend of yours across the brook?" He hit the truth so nearly that Christopher caught breath in a gasp which the other plainly read as admission.

So Gleason had taken the trouble to ponder his case and to think him innocent of the gross charge, while his own kinsman had refused to listen to his defence. The more tractable Christopher became under the Constable's hand, quick and obedient and respectful, in a way that no one who saw him outside the smithy would have dreamed, the harder and more resentful he grew toward Calderwood. The ex-Magistrate, since his nephew was put to live in Gleason's house, had come thither infrequently, and by design, Christopher felt, at hours when he was unlikely to meet his disgraced kinsman, but the smithy work at last forced them face to face. One August morning when Christopher was alone at the forge, a sound of slow hoofs and a well-known voice bidding "Steady, steady, sirrah!" made him look up, and just without the open door stood his uncle, with the wise head of his bay saddle-horse peering over his shoulder.

"Where is the Constable?" Calderwood asked, blinking into the dimmer light of the smithy, and then, by the change that flashed over his face, Christopher knew he had perceived with whom he had to deal. But Calderwood was one to go through with an unpleasant scene, merely because he gladly would have withdrawn from it. "My horse was shod at Romney Marsh, and ill-shod, so he goeth lame," he went on dryly. "Will you find some one to set a new shoe?"

"The Constable's hence, but I can do't, sir," Christopher answered, and, tying the horse near the forge, went about the work. It was the first time he had ventured the shoeing of a horse without having the Constable at hand, and, to his surprise, the anxiety to do his task well concerned him so much more than Calderwood's presence that he scarcely noted when his uncle drifted out at the side-door.

He removed the ill-set shoe, with a good workman's disgust, and re-shod the horse. The creature knew him, he was sure, by the friendly way in which it nuzzled his shoulders. When the work was done, he pulled its forelock out from under the bridle and fed it apples; the harvest of the orchard now was ripening, and, though Christopher fared as well as the next man at table, he never walked without pockets full of fruit for odd lunches.

Presently Calderwood came back from the house, with chill self-possession wrapped about him. "I am glad to find you so profitably busied, Christopher," he said, as he pulled on his riding-gloves. "The Constable hath brought me good and unexpected report of your submissiveness and industry."

"The horse is ready," answered Christopher. "And there is sixpence to pay."

He led the beast out of the smithy, and, laying hand to the leather, held the stirrup for his uncle to mount. Calderwood, ready to spring into the saddle, started back. "Don't do that!" he said harshly.

"It's my trade, sir," Christopher answered, and a moment later, when he put the reins into Calderwood's hand, gave a craftsman's tug at his forelock. "I wonder," he mused, as he watched Calderwood amble up the street, "if he doth not wish by times he had paid heed unto my letter. My aunt is a dear woman, the best of women, but she hath a manner of long-suffering when things fall not to her will."

The encounter which he had dreaded all summer had occurred at last, and, he was aware, he had not come away with the less credit. The same comfort he drew speedily from a meeting with another old acquaintance. It was of a clear morning in early September, when the sultriness of Dog days yielded to cleanly sweet air and a joyous breeze; the Constable was at court, the smithy was closed, and Christopher, as he had been instructed, balanced in the tipmost branches of an apple tree where he was gathering the Kreton pippins. "Don't eat more than you

pick, and don't let the apples fall and be bruised," the Constable had delivered a last admonition. After his smithy, his orchard perhaps stood nearest to Gleason's heart. It ran behind his house-yard, from the wall that skirted the trail that led by Trull's clearing, to Gleason's private path to the upper cornland, a full acre of ground, and some of the trees, dating from the first settlement of Meadowcreek, were near twelve years old.

It was in the top of the oldest and biggest tree that Christopher, as aforesaid, was straddling a branch, when a rustling sound below made him look downward. Just beneath him, on the wall that ran along the trail, Dearmont Killion was swinging his heels. Christopher gave a faint whistle of surprise; he had thought Dearmont safely stored at Newbury, but here he sat in the flesh, blue-black as to his unshaven lower jaw, and glorious in a wine-colored doublet. Through the leaves of the tree Christopher took a second survey; that doublet had begun life on Enoch Gleason's back, he was sure, and it was a good garment, not the sort of cast frippery one throws to a dependent.

Just there Dearmont, in his turn, became aware of Christopher in the tree-top, and hailed him derisively, "You there, sirrah, where's your master?"

"Constable's at court," answered Christopher. The temptation was strong on him to let drive at Dearmont's black head with the last apple he had picked, but the Kreton pippin looked too good for such use; he took a bite of it instead.

Dearmont, standing below, surveyed him gleefully. "How came ye by those breeches, hey, Kester?"

"Just as honestly as you came by that doublet," retorted Christopher, and then, ere Killion could reply, Enoch Gleason strolled into the orchard.

At sight of Killion he paused, and there crept into his florid face a look of anxiety that warmed Christopher's heart. "How came you here? I thought you well placed at Newbury."

"Well, a man can tire o' one thing, can't he, Captain?" Dearmont spoke coolly. "'Twas long praying and up before sunrise. I'm thinking I'd liefer go to sea. I thought 't maybe ye could give me a berth on the *Gilliflower*. Boatswain would fit me well enough."

"It is impossible for me to ship you," Enoch interrupted.

"That's a hard word, Captain. And I was going to tell you —"

"Hush!" For the first time Enoch seemed to see the ladder, and, following up with his eyes into the tree, took note of Christopher. His voice slid from strained civility to open vindictiveness. "What are you eavesdropping there for, you rascal? Come down out o' that. I'll fit you, my gentleman. There's a sack of corn in the stable must go to mill. Just charge it on your shoulders and march along. D'ye hear?"

"Very well, Captain," Christopher answered blandly. "But I must do this piece o' work for your father first."

Enoch blustered a time about being brisk, he'd find work for him the rest of the day, then rolled away with Dearmont grinning at his heels. Christopher chewed thoughtfully at his apple, and wondered what it might be that Killion had to tell. "But they can't tread me down much lower," he reflected. "And now to see to it that the Constable's labor lasts me through the day."

There were but two treefuls of the Kreton pippins, so Christopher, since he had no glimmer of intention of tramping through the village with a sack of corn on his back, worked without undue haste. When Enoch returned to the orchard an hour later, he found the young man piling the basketful of pippins in an accurate pyramid, and pausing, now and then, to polish an apple on his shirt-sleeve. "Your father bade me handle 'em tenderly and not bruise 'em," he drawled, in answer to the Captain's hot expostulations. Indeed, the last polished pippin was not fitted into its due place in the sym-

metric piles till the sun was almost down and the mill for that day had ceased to grind.

"You're a good, careful lad, Kester," the Constable spoke dryly next morning, when he surveyed the neat piles. "Now you take an axe and go over into the south woodlot and chop down the trees are blazed there. Finish the work before you come home."

That meant a terrible day's labor, Christopher knew well, but as he went, not over-eagerly, to seek his axe, he spied Gershom trudging forth from the stable, and on his shoulders rested the contested sack of corn. After all, however the Constable tried to veil it, the victory had been awarded to Christopher.

Another satisfaction almost as great he enjoyed a day or two later, when, on Killion's swaggering into the smithy with his new air of ownership, the Constable stolidly ordered him off the premises. "The Captain —" began Dearmont.

"The Captain is not yet master here," Gleason cut him short, and something equally blunt he must have said to Enoch that evening.

Long after dusk the father and the son paced up and down the house-yard, and, as they made the turning by the stable-door, snatches of their earnest speech drifted to Christopher, who was at work within. "Wherefore is it not laudable for me to be interested in the salvation of young Killion, even as you are in —" Enoch's sullen tones trailed away once; and then, after a long silence, the Constable was heard: "You're master o' the *Gilliflower*; you can ship what sailors you choose. But I warn you Killion's vile to the marrow."

"And that's a true word," mused Christopher. He thought he had already plumbed the depths of Killion's vileness, but he discovered there were even lower soundings of treachery. For Dearmont, after describing the rest of his old comrade's lapses, now set Recompense's petticoats whisking through the story. The time was auspicious; Trull, ever in nervous alarm

since he sheltered the Quakeress, had scraped together a few shillings by his work for Gleason and newly conveyed himself and his household to the eastern settlements, out of harm's way; Crozier and Hayne, who might have punished the traitor, had not been seen, spite of diligent search, since the night of the arrest. Unafraid of contradiction or of vengeance, Killion sowed dexterous hints; he did not speak enough for further legal charges to be laid against young Ferringham, but he made all Meadowcreek to know that a strange woman had lain two nights at Trull's cabin, and for her Christopher had exposed himself.

Right there came forward Benjie, the innocent, with sudden realization of the meaning of queer tales which he had heard during his sojourn in Haverhill. Not only was Christopher the man who had come poorly and in Indian dress to that village, but that very night two stranger women, it was afterward learned, had entered Haverhill. Meadowcreek said it was all of a piece, and a blacker smudge than ever was smeared across the Kestrel's fame.

The bitter fruit of it all he tasted soon. A noon in late September it was, with a hot wind from the south swirling puffs of dust up the white roadway and making doors bang to; the kitchen was stifling, and Christopher, entering at the last moment, begrudged the time till dinner should be over and he could be out in the air again. Enoch was not present, he saw with relief. "He will have stayed at Master Calderwood's," Goodwife Gleason explained to her husband, but just as the household were about to sit at meat, the door crashed open and the Captain strode in.

His face was flushed and his eyes alight; for the first time Christopher realized that to another there might be something attractive in the man. "Give me joy, sir!" he addressed his father, the moment he was within the door. "I have had speech with Nan Calderwood this morn and with her brother —"

Jane Gleason's wiry little frame fairly trembled. "Enoch!" she cried. "She hath spoken at last? She hath plighted you her troth?"

Christopher gripped hold of the back of the settle by which he stood, and he noted that his knuckles whitened with the hardness of his grasp. Then through the Constable's gruff voice of gratulation and his wife's outbursts of joy, Enoch addressed him: "You, Kestrel, run down into the cellar; fetch the bottle of sack at the far end of the shelf. O' my word, no man shall drink worse than wine in this house to-day!"

By feeling rather than any sight, Christopher groped his way down the steep stairs. At the foot he took a misstep in the dark, and the twinge of pain in his ankle tortured him to recollection of where he was and what he did. He fumbled along the shelf so that the bottles clanked beneath his hand; one fell with a shattering crash, and when he stepped, he heard the glass crunch under his foot.

Then he had clambered up the stairs again, and, as he opened the door into the kitchen, the voices burst upon him. "I knew Nan Calderwood's heart was right, in spite of all," Goodwife Gleason was saying.

"Ay, ay, she's a lass worth gold," spoke the Constable, with beaming face. "See to it you deserve her, Enoch."

Christopher set the wine on the table. "I've smashed somewhat there below I must look to," he muttered, with eyes on the bottle. "Hold me excused from dinner, sir."

The door closed behind him, and the merciful dimness of the cellar received him again. Hurtling against tubs and hogsheads, he made his way to the blackest corner, where rude steps led to an outer door, and he cast himself down upon them, with his forehead pressed against the damp wall and his hands tight locked together. "Nan, Nan!" he repeated. Ever since the twilight when he saw her there among the pines with Enoch at her side, he had felt that this might come, he had striven to steel himself against it, yet he knew

now that in his heart he still had hoped. "If 'twere but a decent man," he muttered. "I have no right. But to give herself to him—to him." He slipped down so his head rested on the rough steps.

When he rose at last and faltered across the cellar, he saw that on the strip of grass by the narrow western window it was all sunlight. The afternoon must be wearing late. He cleaned up the mess which the broken bottle had made there by the shelf, and went stolidly up into the kitchen. Goodwife Gleason, who was there alone, rebuked him for his careless waste, but with surprising mildness; it was a day of such jubilation, he realized, that even he was admitted to amnesty.

He slouched forth to the smithy, where on the workbench were scattered the parts of a pistol which he had been mending when he went to dinner. Mechanically he lifted a bit of iron, and tried to focus his thoughts on what he was to do with it. Above the workbench the narrow window stood open; he had a sight of the orchard of the next homestead, and far beyond it, across the brook, of the mellowing woods.

The crunch of a bit of charcoal under a firm step roused him. Right at his side the Constable was standing. "Where have you been, Kester?" he asked, rather sharply. "'Wanted to tell you about that wheel for Raham Mawry and Philip Jeanison's snaphance. The wind is coming well from southward and the tide serves this even, so Master Atherton's pin-nace is going to put forth. I've made my mind to sail in her and look to the land I have at York. I'll not be gone above a week."

Christopher let the bit of iron and the hand that held it fall limply on the workbench. Amid the green trees yonder at the edge of the wood he noted one that flamed a vivid red, and while the Constable talked on of his work—this that he must not attempt, and this that he might venture alone—he stared upon it. "D'ye understand?" Gleason said at length, and laid his hand on Christopher's shoulder.

At the touch Christopher faced him. "Take me with you," he blurted out. "I can't live this next week here. Won't you let me go with you, sir? I—." He broke off, and with nervous rattle began sweeping the parts of the pistol together.

"I don't rightly see how I can take you, boy," the Constable spoke after a moment. "You're prisoner to Massachusetts, and I'm not at liberty to carry you out of the jurisdiction. Yes, yes, you'd keep your parole, I know. But 'twould work you harm in the end. You don't want to come home overland through half the towns in the Bay as my servant. So long as you keep close at Meadowcreek there's a chance this affair of yours may be some time forgotten outside the village. And you want to bear in mind, Kester, that you've still a matter of fifty or sixty years of life before you after your time is served out."

"I know—'twas a childish thing to ask," Christopher muttered in a shamed voice.

Yet so little childish did Gleason hold the request that, ere his departure, he drew Captain Enoch aside and strove to impress upon him the fact that in his absence Kester Ferringham was not to be persecuted. There was scant regard for fair play in his son, the Constable had long since marked sorrowfully, but the success of his wooing had set him in a good temper, so, on the whole, it was with a comfortable feeling that the Kestrel would be left in peace, and all would go well till his return, that Gleason embarked that night.

Now while the Constable, in such happy assurance, was drifting off the Isles of Shoals in the calm of next morning, it chanced that Mistress Nan Calderwood, most slight and tender of stormy petrels, walked down the highway toward Meadowcreek. The day was windless and hot, so she walked slowly, with her skirts grazing the dusty succory of the wayside, but she walked steadily, as one with a goal in view, and her face was calm with a decision at last made irrevocable. For it was over, all the long agony of the burning summer months, of the

hot nights of pitiless self-examination, of wavering determinations. She was to marry Enoch, just as she would have done had Sister Bess's nephew never set foot in Meadowcreek. Nate was pleased, and the Constable, whom she liked, was pleased, and Lucy hailed with joy the prospect of a double wedding in the autumn. For herself—well, a maid must marry, and Enoch was no worse than other men. Her cheeks burned even now as she recalled the shameful story of Christopher Ferringham—he who had set Killion upon her there in the swamp and won her liking by his claptrap rescue; he who, while she prayed for him and wept him as dead, had been disporting himself with those other women at Haverhill; who had gone, with her kiss on his lips, to that outcast girl at Trull's cabin! Nan clenched her hands and walked more swiftly. He was rooted out of her heart; she would be Enoch's very loving wife, just as she had always half expected. And Enoch would be away six months out of every twelve; she gave a little sigh of relief.

She was going that morning to visit Enoch's mother, for in the strength of her new position she had at last the hardihood to venture into Christopher's path. Yet at the Constable's gateway she hesitated, with a half inclination to run and ask her old gossip, Abigail Naylor, what were Christopher's habits and whether she were likely to stumble on him. Then, with a plunge into a disagreeable duty that was like her brother, she entered the dooryard, but, with a compromise that came from the woman in her, she went not to the back door, as was her custom, but entered the street door and passed into the parlor.

It was a dim, cool apartment with a window looking out upon the yard at one side. The square of light drew her eyes thither, and without, by the well, she saw a man standing back to her. It was Christopher; she would have known that yellow-brown head and those broad shoulders in any place. With a sudden breath of pity she took note of his ignominious garments. He turned and, with a brimming bucket in his hand,

came across the yard. The sag of his body, the natural throwing out of his left arm to balance himself, gave her an inexpressible sense of burden and weariness. His face seemed to her harder than she had known it, and his head drooped.

He had passed out of sight round the corner of the house; then, while she still stood breathless, trying to gather herself in hold so she might go in quest of Goodwife Gleason, she heard his step without in the kitchen. Right upon that came a voice, harsh yet with a sharp vindictiveness therein: "You'll have to go the other side, Master Ferringham. 'The gentler blood takes the wall of the baser,' d'ye recall?"

It was Enoch's voice, she realized, with dumb amazement.

"Stay, now; you can put fresh wood to the fire. You're not too proud to kneel, eh?"

There came a sharp titter from the kitchen wench; as if the words were smiting her, Nan pressed her hands to her breast.

"What say you to coming to my wedding, Kestrel?" Enoch's voice ran on. "I'll ask my father give you somewhat to wear; I'm thinking those clothes would do little grace to a feast. Ay, you're laying that fire well. Come, you can lay the fire in the bridal chamber on the marriage night."

Came Christopher's voice, low and deliberate: "Shall you bid Trull's Joan to make the bed?" Only a breathing space, and then, more threat than entreaty in the tone, she heard a cry, "Don't strike me, Captain!"

Nan flung open the door into the kitchen. Sunlight that dazzled on the floor, she was aware of, a clay-faced maid shrunk into a corner, and in the middle of the room the two men, fast grappled, swaying to and fro. "Christopher! Enoch!" she shrieked, and, as the words left her lips, realized it was not her betrothed husband whom she first had called upon.

They fell apart; Christopher, she perceived, had been holding Enoch by the wrists so he could not strike. The Captain stood an instant, rubbing one wrist, while his face worked.

"Go about your business, sirrah!" he spoke at length, and then, as Christopher went out of the kitchen, crossed to her. "Come into the parlor, Nan." He closed the door and shut them in together. "That rascal hath frightened you, dear. You're trembling. I'll fit him for it!"

"I heard how you fit him," she interrupted. "A man that cannot answer you back, that cannot strike you without bringing the law on him, and you — Oh, you coward!"

"There, there, sweetheart!" he tried clumsily to soothe her.

"Don't call me that," she panted. "I shall not marry you."

In the tense instant that followed, the rattle of pans came janglingly from the kitchen. "You mean — to break off —" Enoch repeated. "You love him still."

"I do not love him. I do not love you. Don't touch me!" Her voice grew breathy with terror. "I tell you, I was mistaken. I take back my troth."

Her hand was on the latch. Behind her he poured out expostulations, hot reproaches, but she had flung open the door and fled pantingly up the dusty street. Her skirts whipped round her ankles; her head-kerchief slipped down about her neck; the dust filled her throat, and the vivid sky blinded her. Yet she sped on, with a singing in her ears, and a lightness in her breast that swept her forward. She rushed into the farmhouse at last, and with no stay cast her arms about Elizabeth's neck. "Oh, Bess, Bess!" she broke into a sudden wail. "I shan't marry him; I told him so. I needn't, need I?"

Elizabeth gathered her self-possessed sister-in-law into her arms and, with eyes brimming over, petted her as if she were her own. "Indeed, you shan't marry him; Nathan was at fault to suffer it. There, there, my poor lamb!" But as Nan grew quieter, the good matron wrinkled her brows in perplexity: "My dear, my dear, what will be said in Meadowcreek?"

"Oh, what care I?" Nan turned a sob into a laugh. "I shall not marry Enoch."

CHAPTER XX

FOR PITY'S SAKE

CHRISTOPHER was cleaning out the cattle-pens; it was a task he did not like, and for that reason, he knew well, Captain Enoch had set him about it. The brief order was the only word, good or ill, that had been addressed to him since the mid-morning, and now it was near two of the afternoon. The careful quiet of the household was ominous; Christopher went about with nerves tense and muscles braced for whatever might be in store.

For at last he had done what Enoch wanted him to do; he had lifted his hand against his master, and he now lay open to the rigor of the law. To-morrow was Friday. He wondered if Enoch perhaps would take him into the local court. Though Calderwood was no longer a magistrate, he was one of the three men appointed to end small cases in Meadowcreek, and so would sit in judgment at the preliminary hearing of this matter. Christopher clenched his teeth and swung the muck fork more vigorously. "Doubtless Calderwood hath the whole story by now," he thought. "She saw it; she feared I'd hurt him."

With a flash of comfort there came to Christopher the remembrance of how Enoch had stood powerless in his grasp, and how afterward a white ring had shown on the Captain's wrist where his fingers had pressed. It was not for nothing he had swung a blacksmith's sledge that summer. He began to whistle softly, no tune, rather a hissing breath between his teeth; but he broke off at the sound of a step on the floor of the stable. "Kestrel!" he heard Enoch speak masterfully.

He laid by the muck fork and came out from the pens into the main part of the stable. Enoch stood before him, hands in pockets and a straw between his teeth. "Go over to the smithy," he said, in a studiously quiet voice. "There's a man from Salem hath come in with a broken musket. My father bade you mind the forge. Perhaps you're not above doing that work."

"I'll go," Christopher answered, and stepped out into the house-yard. It was a breathless afternoon; the leaves on the trees in the orchard hung lifeless, and a dull haze was on the sky to westward. A curious yellow tinge was in the air, as if the sun behind the haze were filtering itself away. Christopher looked at the sky and thought carelessly that a tempest might break before sundown. Then he had reached the side-door of the smithy, which, he noted, was unlatched. Right at his heels Enoch was strolling; Christopher glanced over his shoulder, saw the Captain yet chewed his straw, and, with head still turned toward him, pushed open the door and entered the smithy.

Against the glaring window before him a man's black figure silhouetted itself, and in that instant of perception something struck him between the eyes. A lurid blackness, shotten with red flames, closed about him; blindly he tried to strike out, but his arms were gripped from behind. An instant he swayed from right to left, with a merciless weight clamped to either arm and shoulder, then he felt a man's leg bend about his, and with a crash that jarred through every bone, he went to the ground.

For a moment he lay blind and deaf and breathless, then a dash of something cold and wet on his face brought him back to gasping consciousness. Dearmont Killion's face, right above him, and above that, Enoch, without his straw now, he made out dazedly. "Nay, Captain, his skull's too thick to crack for a tap like that," grinned Killion.

It could not be blood upon his face, Christopher reflected;

there was a bucket, half full of black water from the slake trough, in Enoch's hand. "D'ye want the rest of it, or are you done shamming?" questioned the Captain.

"Answer up when your master speaks," jeered Dearmont, and struck Christopher across the face.

Half-stunned and shaken, Christopher yet made a desperate struggle to get to his feet, but Dearmont's knee was pressed upon his chest, and Dearmont was holding his left arm down across his body; his right arm was jammed beneath him torturingly, and a weight was upon his legs. "You're breaking my arm," he muttered. His gaze went beyond the pitiless faces of the men who stood over him, up into the cobwebbed roof of the smithy that was all wavering. He closed his eyes again.

A hammering sound roused him — the sound of one beating with his fists on the main door of the smithy. It was Gleason come back, it was some one come to help him! He made a mighty effort to shake off his captors; Dearmont held him helpless, but at least he got his right arm, though still pinioned, into a position where it was at ease.

Hollowly through the door came Tom Naylor's voice: "Captain Gleason, answer! What's amiss? Open the door. Is there a fight?"

Enoch tossed by the bucket and stepped to the door. "It's all well, Goodman Naylor," he spoke through the crack. "The Kestrel went back to his old tricks and struck me, so I'm giving him a little discipline. Be not affrighted, whatever you hear, and trouble not again to meddle with my matters."

The voice without sank to a grumble; Christopher heard steps receding through the squashy sand, and then it was all quite still again. A moment yet Enoch listened by the great door, then he came leisurely across the smithy and passed out of Christopher's sight up by the forge. The yellow window above the workbench was in Christopher's line of vision. He noted the branch of a pear tree that cut

across its upper corner; the leaves turned dull side out in the little gust that stirred. He saw the familiar litter, each object, that cumbered the workbench, and while his sight was so clear for each detail, his hearing, too, was preternaturally alert; he marked his own heavy breathing, the very creak of a muscle as Dearmont, kneeling above him, shifted his position, and he heard the first snap of a loose board underfoot when Enoch came back to where he lay.

A jangling sound blended with the creak of the footsteps; in Enoch's hand, he saw, swung the fetters with which on that first day the Constable had threatened him. "Put those on him, Gershom," said the Captain, tossing the irons to the man who sat upon the prisoner's legs; Christopher, lying helpless, felt the fellow's hands busied about his ankles. "You will wrestle a fall with me, eh?" Enoch bent over him. "I'll teach you somewhat ere the week's end. I said I'd make you laugh t'other side of your face. You look sober enough now, curse you!"

"Master Enoch," interrupted Field's voice. "There's somewhat wrong. I canna make the fetters fast."

"Give 'em here, you loggerhead!" Enoch snatched from him the fetters that swayed under his sharp clutch, and an instant peered upon the rings. "Plague on the old fool!" he cried. "These were broke three year ago, and a' hath not mended them yet. A pretty constable, that!" Then the grin spread over his face. "You're a fine, hacking fellow, you, Kestrel, to let yourself be frightened last May with a pair o' broken fetters. Come, you're a practised smith. You shall mend them yourself now. Let him up, boys."

"D'ye want the devil loose?" growled Killion.

"I'll look to him," quoth Enoch; he thrust back his doublet and drew a pistol from the belt beneath. "Play me no slippery tricks now, Kester Ferringham, but get up and do as I bid you."

His two assailants, still protesting, had risen and left him

free. Christopher sat up slowly, with his weight thrown on his left hand; the right arm still was numb, and from head to foot he was bruised and sore. He did not lift his eyes above the knees of the men who stood about him. There were three of them, and they all hated him, and there was not a soul in Meadowcreek to help him. An instant the impulse was strong on him to drop down on the floor again and bid them do their pleasure.

A vindictive kick in the side changed his thought. He came to his feet, quivering and tingling, but in that moment of renewed humiliation his wits began to work again. When Enoch gripped him by the right arm, he gave a harsh cry that surprised even the Captain, and flinched out of his grasp. "I tell you my arm is broken!" he gasped. "Don't touch it. For God's sake, don't!"

"Do as I tell you, then," blustered Enoch. "Go mend the lock on those fetters now. Briskly, d'ye mind?"

Swaying and shuffling, Christopher made his way to the forge. His head was drooping and his eyes on the ground, but with something like a sixth sense he took in the position of each man, the place of each tool and bit of iron and bench and tub in the smithy. He picked up with his left hand a thick bar of iron and, using it for poker, clumsily opened the bed of live coals. "One of you'll have to blow the bellows," he said sullenly. "You've fitted my arm so I'll not do it in weeks."

"Why, I'll do't for you, for old friendship's sake," laughed Dearmont, and, fetching Christopher a staggering clap on the shoulder, strode to the forge and laid hand on the lever.

Moving wearily, Christopher fetched a pair of heavy pinchers and thrust them into the coals beside the poker, then half leaned against the anvil and watched the red flicks of flame that, under Dearmont's steady blowing, began to play among the coals. Dearmont was before him on his left hand, and, also at his left hand, but behind him, Gershom Field lounged

against the workbench. At the right, closer to him, stood Enoch Gleason. Out of the tail of his eye Christopher watched him and watched the pistol in his hand. It carried but a single ball, and doubtless it would not shoot in a straight line, but the range was very short. Christopher took the step or two to the forge, looked at his implements; they rested in the coals on the side farthest from Dearmont, and they were near white hot.

One last instant he hesitated yet, with the flames licking red before his eyes, and his heart thudding so it was like the crash of loud water. Next instant he had caught the sizzling poker in his right hand and wheeled upon Enoch. He heard a cry behind him, but ere the bellows ceased creaking under Dearmont's hold, he had seen Enoch fling up his hand to fire, and, bringing down the poker on his arm, he snapped it like a straw. He heard the clatter with which the pistol struck the floor, and he swung about in time to see, right before him, Dearmont's dark face with the grin baring his teeth. "Blow for blow!" shouted Christopher, and smote him across the cheek with the heavy bar. The bones seemed fairly to crash; the man gave a hideous outcry, cast up his hands, and heaved over backward.

Across his body Christopher went straight at Gershom Field. The man was past forty and heavy on his feet, but he was strong and fresh for the contest. He caught on his shoulder the blow of the iron bar that was aimed at his head, and the two grappled. Christopher dropped his weapon and with naked fists struck and warded. A bullet sang past his shoulder. "A' cannot shoot left-handed," he thought swiftly.

Gershom edged in between him and the forge where his pinchers lay. Then as he strove with him still, Christopher was aware that Dearmont, with the blood dribbling from his mouth, was staggering upon him like a half-throttled bulldog. His hands were busied with Gershom, but as he parried a blow from the fellow, he contrived to reach Dearmont a kick below the belt that sent him howling to the ground. Again he and

Gershom were locked in close grip, and he realized what words the serving-man was calling: "Strike quick! I'll hold him!"

Desperately Christopher swung the man round. Enoch had a knife, of course; they all carried knives at their belts but he. Over Gershom's shoulder he saw the heap of scrap iron that lay in the corner of the smithy. "Strike! I'm forspent!" gasped Field.

Christopher suddenly loosed his hold, bent, thrust one hand beneath the man's leg and, with an output of strength that thought of the knife alone could give, raised him up and hurled him headlong. He heard the clatter of iron as the fellow struck fair amid the pile.

With breath heaving in his chest, he fronted Enoch Gleason. He heard Dearthmont moaning where he lay, but for the rest a dreadful stillness was in the smithy. Enoch, with the knife in his left hand, drew back toward the side-door. "You will?" yelled Christopher. The Captain's knife ripped across the front of his shirt, no more than scoring the skin. His hands closed on Enoch's throat, and together they pitched to the floor. Enoch was undermost. Christopher, kneeling upon him, tore away the arm he had thrust up to shield his head, and crashed his fist down into his face. "You will set me in the bolts!" he raged.

Behind him the main door creaked and rattled. "Help, for God's love! Help!" screamed Enoch.

"You bade them not to meddle!" shouted Christopher. "You will make me fetch and carry, you losel!" He saw the blood streak across the writhing face below him. "How like you of my broken right arm? You'll make me lay the fire, pest choke your black heart! God's wounds! I'll mark you 'gainst your wedding-night!"

A sight of terror, even in the midst of his red madness, he saw before him Gershom Field, fumbling on hands and knees along the wall for the door, with the blood from his broken head streaming into his eyes. Christopher stayed his upraised

fist. Outside, he now became aware, voices murmured, feet were running toward the side-entrance. He sprang up and stood staring upon the narrow door. "Open!" one cried. Enoch must have barred it for the better securing of his victim, and now Enoch lay whining and groaning at Christopher's feet.

The latch rattled beneath a furious hand. Christopher snatched from the floor Enoch's knife and the emptied pistol, just as the door burst inward and against the lowering sky showed white faces. "Lord be merciful to us!" cried Raham Mawry.

"Don't try to come at me!" gasped Christopher. Covering them with the empty pistol, he stepped backward to the main door.

"A' hath murdered them!" yelled Batter's voice.

"Head him off, lads!" shouted the miller.

Christopher wheeled about; with one swift turn of the hand — he saw the knuckles were red — he struck the bolt-bar from the sockets and shoved the door open. A little puff of hot wind smote in his face. A woman's voice screamed harshly from the next dooryard. Women, with their aprons a-blow, a towsy-haired child, a straggling man or two, were in the market place. "Keep back!" Christopher cried, in a high voice that quavered, and with the bared knife in his hand dashed across the street.

Behind him came the shouts of pursuers, and the pad of feet in the sand. The stuff clogged his shoes, blood was before his eyes, and he ran unsteadily. Half falling, he reeled over the threshold of the alehouse and clapped to the door behind him. Abigail Naylor, flinching before him from the doorway, fronted him. She was wringing her hands. "Oh, Kester, Kester!" she wailed. "'Tis a black day!"

"I'll hide in your cellar!" he panted, and, dashing down the useless pistol, ran out of the common room. It was not the cellar which he sought, however, but, with another of those

swift plans that seemed no work of his mind, ran past the cellar door into the chamber, and, flinging open the window, cast himself out.

The ground here fell away somewhat. He rolled over and over, with the yellow sky whirling round him, then sprang to his feet and ran blindly. The harbor, glassy gray, followed on his right hand, and on the left were the backs of house-yards, with clumps of fruit bushes, gnarled apple trees, a stack of straw. From shelter to shelter he staggered, still with the redness before his eyes and a bitterness as of blood in his mouth. As he skulked in the shelter of an outhouse, he had sight, at the brow of the rising ground, of the roadway, and there, keeping watch, was a man on a bay saddle-horse. Calderwood was hunting him, they all were hunting him.

He vaulted a fence into a cornfield, where the tall stalks screened him. As he crushed his way through, he thrust into his belt the knife that hampered his hands for climbing. The long leaves rustled behind him and, grazing his face, made him shiver and reel forward the faster. Beyond the cornstalks the pine woods crept down to the fields. Staggering and spent, he stumbled into the first shadow of the trees and fell down.

When he lifted his head, he saw the long white street of the village all dotted with black figures, like the swarming of ants. Some stragglers were approaching the cornfield. There was no stay nor rest for him. He scrambled to his feet and panted onward. The pines grew thick, and the dense branches buffeted him. Once his foot caught, and he fell so heavily that a time he lay quiet, till in the distance the halloo of pursuers roused him. The breath was gone from his throat, and it was as if bands of iron were drawn round his chest, but he rose and pitched forward.

The blue of water showed now between the tree trunks. It was the headland whence he had watched for the letters out of England that he was crossing, and below him lay Lastbrook

cove. To Calderwood his blind flight had brought him, to Calderwood, of all men! There at the edge of the wood he wavered breathless, and gazed upon the distant farmhouse, beneath the pines on the mellow upland. Then before his dizzied eyes a horseman came swinging out from the wood upon his left hand, where the by-way debouched upon the open fields. At his stirrup a footman pounded along, and another and another, with shirt-sleeves white amid the dark trees, poured after him. A dry sobbing shook the Kestrel's body. Already they were upon him; they would run him down, there within sight of home.

He flung up his impotent clenched fists against the hard black sky; then his nerveless arms fell limply at his sides, and he dropped to his knees, with his head against the pitchy roots of the nearest tree. Out in the open the footmen were straggling toward the farmhouse. When they beat backward to the wood — There he caught a gasping breath. For his eyes had travelled listlessly to the cove, where Calderwood had taken him out in the canoe that first day, and there upon the beach, at the foot of the path up the bluff, lay the canoe, and farther out at anchor rode the shallop. A ripple of wind came from the west. He could handle the boat alone at need; there was nothing to outsail her in all Meadowcreek harbor.

On hands and knees, for he durst not rise lest the searchers yonder at the farmhouse spy him, he rolled and scrambled through the pine needles and the harsh litter of twigs down the steep slope to the beach. He could hear the lap of the waves on the sand, but louder still was a roaring in his ears, and his throat burned with each short breath he drew. In the shadow of the bluff he pitched to his feet and stumbled forward. The sand was heavy, and the bushes of the opposite point shot up into the sky before him and shrank again. Once he went down, and again he reeled to his feet. It was far, so far, and his chest seemed bursting, and all was blurry to his eyes. "God! I can't do it!" he thought to scream aloud.

He heard but the husky rattle of a whisper, and then the coarse sand was clammy beneath his cheek where he lay full length upon the shore. He heard the ripple of the waves, and out across their gray surface he saw a gray sky all streaked and shotten.

Long time or short time, he knew not, but each breath he drew still pierced his side with a torture that made him shrink, when he heard a sound that was not the pulsing of the sea. Footfalls on sand, light footfalls on the path over the bluff, and a frightened girl's voice that he should know: "But whither will you go? Stay, Nan. Whither will you go?"

"Out of the house!" He knew that voice, though he had never heard in it that agonized note. "Anywhither but there. If they take him there— Oh-h!" It was an inarticulate moaning, and then on the sudden it changed to one sharp outcry, and ceased.

Even in the keen pain that racked him, he remembered that other time when she went by him without a glance, there where he sat shamed in the stocks. He shut his eyes, glad that he did not see her face. Then he heard the quick flutter of one breathing near him, and his head lay softly on the girl's lap, and her arms were strained about his shoulders.

"Oh, poor Christopher! They'll find him! What shall we do?" He guessed that Lucy wrung her hands while she wailed the words, but he had opened his eyes upon Nan's face, bent over him, and he saw nothing else. The color had gone from her lips, and her level brows were drawn as with physical suffering. "They shan't touch you!" she said in a stifled voice, and crouched the closer over him. "They shan't touch you!"

Lucy still wailed unregarded: "They'll search the house and the outbuildings. Then they'll beat the wood, they'll come to the shore. They'll find him. They'll have him whipped. Oh, what shall we do?"

"Be quiet!" Nan's voice rasped. Her eyes had lighted

again, and a spot of color flamed on either cheek. "The canoe, Lucy. Quick, drag it hither!"

Once more the sand was cold beneath Christopher's cheek. He heard the receding patter of feet, then a splashing at the margin of the water, ever louder, and with reviving strength he pulled himself up on his elbows. All the wide sky and the water still were hazy, but within a fathom's length he saw that the canoe lay half on shore, and over him Nan stood. Her blue skirt was dragged and dripping to the knee. "Stand up, Christie! You must stand up!" she repeated, and laid her hand on his shoulder. "I'll take you to the shallop. You can get away. Oh, prithee stand up, dear."

He had thought never again to find the strength in his trembling knees, but at her word he crawled to his feet and, leaning heavily upon her shoulder, tottered to the canoe. He fell safe into the craft at last. Above him was the threatening sky and the rim of the bluff against it, and then, as the canoe slid out into the water, he saw only Nan. She knelt in the stern, face to him, and her arms, as she swung the paddle, came into clear outline against the sky. Her head was uncovered, and the loosened strands of hair stirred about her forehead.

With sudden shock through its frail bulk the canoe scraped against the side of the shallop. Christopher sat up slowly; the helpless agony of exhaustion was passing now; he was breathing more steadily, and he was able to clamber over into the shallop, but he had to hold fast by the gunwale. The girl eyed him questioningly, and darted a glance over her shoulder toward the farmhouse on the upland. Both could see among the outbuildings the black go and come of men, and stragglers were scattering into the fields. "I must help you," she offered what he could not ask, and sprang into the boat beside him.

At that moment from shoreward rang a halloo. The searchers had found the track at last. One man came tearing across the

field toward the bluff, and the ruck of pursuit thronged after him. The bay horse and its rider, too, galloped breakneck, outdistanced the rear, and plunged on in the lead of them all. Neither Christopher nor Nan could tell which first sought the other, but they stood in the swaying shallop with hands fast locked. "It's — in vain," he panted. "Nate always — gets his way. I'll say I forced you."

"Give me your knife," she breathed. "I'll cut the mooring-rope. Do you hoist the sail."

The strength was pouring back into his bruised and breathless body, somewhat because of her presence, somewhat, too, because of the helpless rage of the men upon the shore, whence every boat was gone. He dragged at the halyards, clenched the rope firm with his full weight upon it, and drew another breath ere he hauled again. She was beside him then and laid her slender strength to his. The sail creaked into place, and, filling with the languid puff of wind, drew the boat sluggishly toward the eastern point. Pitching over the thwarts, Christopher gained the stern, and, thrusting the sheets into the girl's hands, himself took the tiller.

Then from the beach rose a furious cry. "Put back! Put back, I say! Nan!" The girl set her lips and looked ahead at the sail, but Christopher glanced back to the shore. There, girth-deep in the water, pawed the bay horse, and on its back it was Calderwood who raged, no longer the self-contained Puritan, but brother to the girl in the shallop. A moment later Christopher saw his kinsman swing the horse about and, with a vicious slash of the upraised arm that meant a cut with the switch, urge it up over the bluff. At full gallop he darted away across the field, and haphazard the most of the black figures straggled after him. At Meadowcreek they could get boats to head off the shallop.

The cove was now very quiet. The little wind no more than fluttered the surface of the water, and the sail drooped almost lifeless. The eastern point, whither they must tack to catch

the breeze, did but crawl to meet them. Christopher moistened his lips and gripped the tiller hard. Over his shoulder he looked upon the home-shore, with its small knot of sentinels, still so near, and on the blank sky above that seemed windless. Then as his glance fell lower, he noted the canoe that drifted astern. "You cannot get to land in her," he said. "I'll set you ashore on the point."

The girl beside him nodded. She sat near him, so near that his torn shirt-sleeve grazed her hand. He watched her tense face, each line; there were so few moments left him. The eastern point drew nearer, though now he found himself praying that it come not so soon. He could see the dusty leaves of the bushes turn white side up, and under the gunwale of the shallop the water was shoaling so he could count the pebbles on the bottom. Not four feet of depth were here, and the strip of white beach was less than ten feet distant on the larboard quarter. He laid his hand on a fold of her gown. "I can run no nearer," he faltered.

She put her hand on his, without looking at him. The boat slipped forward her length, the sail filled with a sudden puff of wind, and the water yawned wider between them and the land. A little ripple sounded beneath the tiller, as the shallop came about and stood toward the mouth of the cove. There in the east a blink of heat-lightning quivered on the dark sky. They were heading for the harbor, and Nan still was at his side.

Full realization came slowly to him. He stared upon her face, rigidly set to the front, and he saw that the color flushed and died in her cheeks and her eyes sparkled. He choked an inarticulate cry, and caught her hand and held it to his lips. Over in the west the thunder growled, but he did not raise his head from where it rested against her hand till her vibrant voice reached him: "Christie, look up! Before us— Oh, we shall not make it!"

He came to his feet then, and peered ahead. The wide har-

bor lay before them now, and there, upon the right hand, Mawry's longboat swung forth from the wharf. He gazed stupidly at his pursuers — their oars kept good time, he noted, — and he shrugged his shoulders and looked again at Nan. Her brave face quivered and her eyes had filled. He put his arm about her where she sat, though he yet steadied the tiller with his other hand. "What matter?" he said low. "In spite of all, however they use me, you love me?"

She nodded. He saw the motion of her coppery head that nestled itself against his fustian jacket. He turned his face hardily toward the longboat, and he felt upon his cheek a great splash of rain. The west was inky black, and as he looked thither, a long flare of lightning rent the sky, and again the thunder rattled. He strained the girl closer to him. "Pray, dear!" he cried. "If the storm break in time! Pray!"

"How can I pray?" she cried, with sudden sharpness, but still she clung to him.

The still water curdled under the slow spatter of rain. Over the wrinkled surface the shallop no more than crawled, and to starboard the longboat was sweeping forward. He could hear the clatter of the oars, and he thought to know the voice that cried to the rowers to bend to the work. Then he lost the voice in the sudden burst of wind that flapped down upon them. He snatched the sheets from Nan just as they stretched to tautness. The sail bellied, and the shallop came creaking about, stern to its pursuers. In the bow of the longboat he sensed that it was Calderwood leaned forward, and he heard him shout, "Lie to!"

The rush of the bursting storm drowned the rest, and the white veil of the rain clouded the sight of the longboat. Again the sky was torn with jagged lightning, and on it boomed the thunder. Nan gave a choked cry, but she held fast to the tiller. Christopher turned toward the dim longboat. "God rest you!" he shouted, and, with the straining sheets sawing his hands, headed for the open sea.

CHAPTER XXI

HER BROTHER'S SISTER

UNDER the faint light of the sun of the second morning, which was feeling its way through the dun clouds on the horizon, the dismasted shallop was wallowing amid the gray waves. Westward, like smoke, the fog rolled up and showed the long billows that heaved beneath it, and out of the mist a gull came flapping. Christopher forced back his dizzy head and watched the bird's flight, then peered again into the fog to southward. "We are within Cape Cod." He stammered with cold. "We shall make land yet, dear."

The girl who sat amidships did not answer, nor even look at him. She crouched upon the thwart, for in the bottom of the shallop a good foot of water slopped to and fro with every heave of the little craft. She watched, fascinated, the can that drifted with the wash of the water. She had bailed—for six and thirty hours she had done little else. Now her hands were cut and swollen, and she was drenched to the skin, and every bone of her body ached with cold and weariness. She felt a dull hatred for that bailer with which she had labored, for the muffled sky, and the ceaseless water, and the shattered boat which bore them. To die at Christopher's side, to go down in the storm, even though to hell, and end the sorry tangle where her love had led her, that had been easy, but this dying by minutes, the horror of the hours of sordid physical discomfort—she hid her face, but there was not in her even heart to weep. Rather, she felt, keener than the mental

anguish, the clammy pressure of her wet garments upon her chilled body. She was wearing Christopher's fustian jacket over her bodice, and the coarse stuff had chafed her neck raw.

Long time, perhaps, she had cowered there upon the thwart, when she heard a cry from him, "'Sdeath!" Always cursing, even now! She lifted her head heavily. The fog had rolled away; overhead the sky was blue, with ripples of white cloud, and southward, over the brightening water, rose a dark line that was no mirage. "It's land!" she heard him repeat, with a catch of nervous laughter. "'Tis the Cape. After all! Mawry spoke truth when he said I was born for hanging. We're safe, Nan; there's all life before us."

He had been drooping listlessly over the great sweep at the stern, but now he bent to it in feeble earnest. Dully she watched him as he swayed to and fro against the blue sky. His coarse shirt hung in rags upon his shoulders, and his drenched hair fell about his white face. His forehead was bruised, and there was a raw cut upon his cheek, just as he had been wont of old to come from shameful scufflings. When he rested on the oar an instant to gaze upon her, she swung about heart-sickly back to him, and turned her eyes to the approaching shore.

Slowly the shallop drew thither on the inflowing tide. The outlines of the land grew plainer, the points of the trees against the sky, the strip of beach, and then the white and green and darker green divisions of beach and field and wood. They were close inshore now, so close that they could see the country was deserted, and, bringing the boat broadside to the land, Christopher sculled slowly along in search of some habited spot. "We've the day before us, and we'll surely come on settled places," he shivered cheerily.

She did not turn her head. The danger that had justified her was over now, she knew; they would live. With tight-wrung hands, she gazed on the monotonous shore of sand and scrub pine that crept by them, while on her mind there dawned

a ghastly resemblance between its barren sameness and the life that now stretched its months and years before her. Not eight and forty hours before, as she walked down the dusty highway to Meadowcreek, she remembered pitilessly how she had proved to herself the vileness of the Kestrel. Two nights of danger could not change him. Profligate, trickster — had he not tricked her at the outset with his claptrap rescue of her from his ally Killion in the swamp? How could she be sure that the danger from which her headlong pity sought to snatch him was real? Danger from Nate, the most just of men? He had tricked and duped her from first to last, and now her own folly had given him his desire. With what exultation his eyes now must rest upon her! He was her all now, in the sight of the world, in her own sight. The tears welled slowly to her aching eyes. What words had she said to him there in Lastbrook cove? All her hidden love was naked now in the glare of light and showed a thing of abomination. She dropped her head on her knees and wept strangely. The water soused about her skirts, and she had no care even to seek to be dry. He could not quit his oar, but he spoke to her in that voice with which he was wont to wheedle. She covered her ears with her hands and wept on.

Some time passed, time enough for her eyes to burn and her head to ache, and then she heard, spite of her efforts not to hear, a loud halloo from the stern, and from before her answered a fainter call. She heard, too, the clatter of the oar as it was shipped, and then she heard him stumbling toward her, and felt his hand upon her shoulder. "Prithee do not touch me!" she shrank from him. "I am so cold."

"You'll be housed soon, poor little girl!" His voice was thick with excitement. "They're putting off from shore. Look up, Nan!"

She raised her head listlessly. Not a gunshot off, the low shore of a shallow bay joined the water's edge, and there men were launching a boat, and others, a little black throng, stood

to watch them. Beyond, upon the sand dunes, were straggling cottages. Shelter and warmth and food were there, as in Meadowcreek, and, as in Meadowcreek, the peering eyes and eager tongues of men and women. Nan gazed half in dread upon the approaching boat. "You leave the telling of the tale to me and swear to all I say," she heard Christopher speak softly, and she flashed a first glance at him. He realized too. People would whisper and point, whisper of her. For those hours with him, libertine and outcast, she had bartered the sweetness and fair esteem of her old ordered existence.

The rescuing boat, a scaly fisher-craft, lay alongside. The bearded, burnt faces of men looked upon the castaways, and a rumble of gruff questions greeted them. "We were blown out to sea," Christopher's voice came with slow effort. "I am servant to a gentleman lives in the Bay. I am called Kit Ferrers. Yon is my master's daughter, Mistress Anne Wood. I was carrying her to her grandam in Boston."

He told his lies with all his old zest. Nan looked on him an instant, wide-eyed, then laughed and sobbed, and in such sorry case suffered the men lift her over into the fisher-boat. They tried clumsily to soothe her. "Ye'll be safe here in Marshpoint ere a glass is run," comforted a gray-bearded man whom they called Jabez Harlowe. "And my woman will look kindly to ye, child."

"Prithee take me to her!" the girl choked, and when the keel at last grated on the sand, clambered forth hurriedly, in terror lest Christopher offer to touch her, and, clinging fast to Goodman Harlowe, tottered away.

But Christopher Ferringham, who, half-clad in October weather, had handled an open boat for near eight and forty hours, was past vexing any one. When he saw the girl was at last in safe hands, he drew a long breath, half rose from the thwart where he had swayed, then collapsed in the bottom of the boat. He had but the vaguest recollections thereafter — of being lifted bodily out upon the sand, of the feel of liquor

coursing down his throat, of the sight, over the shoulders of the men, of the pitying faces of women — until he found himself in an unfamiliar cabin where a blessed fire blazed, and the master of the house, whom they called Thomas Wright, and a man whom he addressed as Luke Allen, were stripping him out of his soaked garments.

“Hey, lad,” spoke Wright, with one hand on Christopher’s bare shoulder, “you’ve been mauled shrewdly, and not eight and forty hours ago.”

“Yes,” Christopher breathed, and when he was laid in a bunk, too wearied even to shift his position, heard his host speak on, “A runaway, you mark my word, Luke.”

“Truth, ’tis raining runaway serving-men out o’ the Bay upon Cape Cod,” drawled the other. “And in couples too. It seemeth the custom for them to walk with clogs at their heels. Here’s the long-legged Scotchman falls in at Yarmouth with his doxy —”

Half conscious though he was, Christopher turned his head. “What Scotchman?” he whispered. “Is it Rinyon?”

“To be sure, they’d know each other,” Wright wagged his head. “Ben’t they both from the Bay?”

“Ay, the man is called Rinyon Crozier,” Allen spoke, after an instant. “He hath labored the last three months for my brother at Yarmouth.”

“I want to see him,” pleaded Christopher. “Send him to me. Or I’ll go to Yarmouth.”

Allen advised him not to go that day, superfluous counsel, for a thorough pounding, and a night of life-and-death labor in the shallop, and twenty-four hours of drenching and chill atop of all, had brought Christopher to such a state that for many hours he was constrained to lie quiet in the bunk. Thomas Wright was a widower; he and his son, young Tom, looked to Christopher’s wants in rough fashion, then left him, with a jug of water within reach, while they went to their day’s labor. Marshpoint was a poor little village where the soil was

scanty and men must work early and late. Nor could they give him sympathy or comfort when he begged for news of "the young mistress." Jabez Harlowe's wife had taken her in, they answered him briefly, and, in terror lest too eager questioning work the girl harm, he had to content himself with such reply.

So all day he lay alone, and watched the autumn sunlight crawl along the rude floor, and the logs break into flaky ashes on the hearth. Sometimes when he slipped from drowsing to waking and felt himself warm and snug, his thoughts ran pleasantly. Every moment of those hours with Nan in the shallop came back to him; she was his; she had given herself to him. But at other times, above all in the night when he lay wide-eyed in the dark, tormenting thoughts harassed him. What a look was that on her face, when she shrank from him, there in the shallop! It was but that she was ill and spent; it would pass, he assured himself; yet he winced at thought of what he must suffer if when he next saw her she still turned upon him such a look.

Then, too, came vexations, beside that great dread mere pin-pricks, that none the less disturbed him. He was penniless; every mouthful he ate, every moment he slept in that hard bunk, laid him under heavier obligations to the Wrights. How was he, a sheer beggar, to care for the woman who had trusted herself to his protection?

So importunate was he to rise, that young Tom winnowed the village to find him clothes; Christopher's jacket and stockings, well dried, might serve him still, but his shirt was in shreds, and his hated leather breeches were too stiff ever to be worn again. Tom fetched him at last the needed garments; they were worn, old ones, and the breeches were clouted at the knees. "Sure; it's a sorry trim for a man to go seek his sweet-heart in," he laughed.

Christopher's brows drew together. "What do you mean by such light speaking of Mistress Wood?"

The elder Wright bade his son be silent and not vex the sick

man. "It's just some silly women's chatter the boy is repeating," he growled an explanation.

There were gossips here, even as in Meadowcreek, Christopher realized. He called to mind, too, the jesting words which Allen had spoken of Mistress Calderwood that first day when he was brought to Wright's cabin. His flimsy tale had profited little; to Marshpoint he was plainly an ill-treated servant who had run away, and Nan — he could guess what they were saying of her.

That very afternoon, as soon as his hosts were gone to their labor, he rose and by painful stages dressed himself. His shoes were stiff with salt water so that he could not force them on, and, with the grim acceptance of a distasteful task which he had learned that summer, he was greasing them, when with a rattle of the latch the door opened. Would Wright bid him go back to bed? he wondered, and even in the thought lifted his head, and saw that in the doorway stood Rinyon Crozier.

Christopher limped to meet him and put his arms about his neck, carefully, because his fingers were greasy and Crozier wore a tolerable doublet. "'Heart! but I'm glad to see thee!" he cried, for one instant forgetting Nan and the trouble that had set him huddling into his clothes. "How knew you? How came you here?"

It was thanks to Luke Allen, Rinyon explained; the man whose light speech Christopher still recalled with irritation, had gone out of his way to Yarmouth to carry Rinyon news of one Kit Ferrers who was at Marshpoint. "So I am here," ended Crozier. "Now gie me ane o' those shoon."

They sat down on the form by the hearth, and as they worked, Christopher, with a shyness at confessing his plight which he scarcely understood, questioned Rinyon further. There was little to tell, the Scotchman answered; by shifts and bribes with the liberal supply of money which Christopher had given him, he had brought Recompense into the Plymouth jurisdiction, to Scituate, where the Quaker doctrines were gain-

ing ground. But whispers of persecution were heard even there, so he brought her clear to Sandwich on the Cape, where he had placed her with people of her own belief. "She's a sonsie lassie and gentle-spoken," he concluded. "I'm thinking she canna take after her mither."

Then a time there was silence, while Christopher, with his new taciturnity, suppld the stiff leather, till Crozier asked abruptly, "It is Mistress Calderwood came with ye, is't not? You have't in mind to push on to Aquidnay?"

"Why Aquidnay?"

"'Twill be easier there to make the marriage," Crozier answered simply.

"So you hold that she and I have made an evasion?" Christopher questioned. "'Twasn't quite so." A flash of the old merriment glinted across his face. "Dominie, I'm going to tell you matter that will amaze even you."

He told him all that had fallen since the May night when they parted on the bank of the brook, told it unsparingly, and Rinyon put down the shoe at which he worked and stared at him, then rose and paced to the window, and paced back again. "And here I was catching the bit fishes and going my ain way while they put ye to that!" he repeated. "Man Christie, why did ye na speak?"

Christopher laughed a little; he knew, and he gave Rinyon to know, that he had been taken in so ugly a gin that silence was his only course. Yet a haunting penitence for what he might have foreseen and somehow prevented, made Crozier very sober and very tender of Christopher. He sent him peremptorily back to bed, and, staying that night with him, told him all he knew of the lands to be had in Aquidnay, and he forced upon him some ten shillings. He had a plenty, he assured Christopher; he had been all the summer on a fishing-boat that belonged to John Allen of Yarmouth. After all, the sea liked him better than the land, so he and young Robert Allen were going that winter as foremast men on a

voyage to Barbadoes, in a ship that belonged to Captain Alden of Duxbury. In three days' time they must go across the bay to Plymouth and be ready to sail, so he could spend no more than that night with Christopher.

"Ere I go I maun speak again with Recompense," he made his farewells next morning. "I would I saw ye once mair too, Christie, but all's open water afore ye now."

They embraced, with the heartiness of a reunion and a sudden parting joined in one, and Rinyon promised to seek his friend at Aquidnay, come spring, and so he went away again. For Christopher, he crept into the street and walked a little, and, listening to the talk of the curious people, learned where Jabez Harlowe's cottage stood. He asked nothing point-blank; he breathed no word of Mistress Calderwood; but the coarse banter of the men showed him his precautions were useless. So even next morning he gathered his returning strength and made his way to Harlowe's cottage.

It was, like the other houses of Marshpoint, a poor cabin of but a story and a half, and it stood back from the main line of the hamlet upon the slope of a sandy hill, where straggled blueberry bushes. From halfway up the hill, where he stopped for breath, Christopher could see the bay glimmering across the brown marshes, the thatched roofs of the hamlet, the stretches of fading pasture, the open fields, stubbly with the half-garnered harvest. There he stepped at a rounder pace, for in the nearest garden patch he spied a stout woman pottering up and down; she answered to the village's description of Goodwife Harlowe, so perhaps he would find Nan alone.

Of a truth, luck had it so, for as he drew near to the cabin he saw that Nan Calderwood herself, a slight form in a draggled gown, sat upon the doorstone. Her hands were clasped upon her lap, her head rested against the door-jamb, and her eyes were closed. So meagre and piteous did she look that his heart misgave him, but at length he rustled forward through the bushes to her side.

So much was she the old Nan that, when she opened her eyes, she did not start up nor flinch, only clasped her hands more firmly and gazed upon him. On her face was the look that had stabbed him that morning in the water-logged shallop. "Nan, I must speak with you," he said, gently as might be. "Let us go in. I've much to say."

She led the way into the poor common room. Her head was stiffly erect, but her heart was stifling in her throat, and she trembled so uncontrollably that she was glad to sit down on the form by the cold hearth. "I am listening," she said, and forced herself to meet his eyes.

He hesitated. "You have been ill. I would not vex you now, but this must end. It's over a week we've been here."

"I know."

"I wanted to speak to you of what I'd planned." An instant a pale reflection of the mood in which he used to seek her counsel, there at Lastbrook, came over him. He drew a stool a little toward the form and sat down. "Rinyon Crozier sails in a day or two for Plymouth. Were it not well that we sent thither a letter for — for Master Calderwood?"

"No!" she cried sharply.

"But, dear," he urged, "they'll surely hold us drowned in the tempest. Why grieve poor Aunt Bess?"

"You were not wont to be so careful."

At the bitter words he felt the blood creep upward to his face, but he said only: "That's some months ago, Nan. She will be troubled. And I would have the Constable know I did not break my parole. I said I would run away if they tried to set me in irons." He had a wistful hope that perhaps now she would ask of the fight and learn how he had been put upon, but she still sat silent with inscrutable eyes on his face. "We need not fear, for ere the letter reach them we'll be at Aquidnay."

"Among the heretics," she said dully.

"They use newcomers kindly, Rinyon saith. No doubt

they'll give me land, and I've a trade now too," he added eagerly. "Gleason said in time I would make a tolerable smith, and he was not one to scatter praises about. I'll work, I'll —" He started toward her. "You will come with me, Nan? I'll take care of you, I'll try to make amends yet for all. I love —"

"Prithee." It was the attitude more than the voice stayed him; without rising, she had drawn back the upper part of her body, far from him as the bench would suffer her.

His hands fell limply to his sides. "What does it mean, Nan?"

Her voice came colorless, as if she repeated a long-learned lesson: "I shall not marry you."

A little instant of silence followed, in which was audible the deep breath she drew. He went slowly to the western window, and a space gazed, without seeing, out upon the brown fields. Then he faced her, steady and patient. "You're not well recovered yet, Nan. Shall I go now and come again to speak of this?"

"Let us end it now," she said low, lest her voice shake. It was worse, far worse even than she had dreaded; this white patience, so strange in the scatter-headed Kestrel, startled her self-possession. "I cannot marry you; I — I am betrothed to Enoch Gleason."

"Surely, the betrothal is broken now."

"I broke it, even the day I fled with you. But it is there in the sight of God."

He came and stood over her. "In whose sight was it you said you loved me? Nan, Nan, I'm no wickeder now than I was that day in the shallop. Did you tell me the truth then?"

She pressed her tight-wrung hands between her knees. "I was mad!" she spoke, with eyes upon the sanded floor at her feet.

"Did you tell me the truth? Look at me!" He dropped on his knees before her and gazed up into her eyes. "I knew

you were not a liar," he said dryly. "Now answer me truly again, before God: do you not love me even now?"

Very slowly she got to her feet, and, plucking at her skirts with one twitching hand, drew back so she leaned against a corner of the fireplace. "Yes," she said, and drew her open hand across her forehead. "God forgive me, I love you. No!" For he had started up at the word. "That does not mean I will marry you. They shall not say I broke my betrothal for lust of the flesh, to flee with another man."

"Will you let the babble of gossips hold us apart?" he cried.

"It is more than gossips' babble. How can you dream I would marry you?" she broke out; the humiliation of the confession he had wrested from her swept her on. "Love you, yes. I could not see you whipped, I could not see you shamed again. To save you I would have died with you in my sin. But I will not live with you, bind myself to you—you with your iniquities upon you, you that have deceived me, even from that earliest day in the swamp, when I thought you—" A sob cut her speech. "Oh, 'tis not for you I weep!" she cried bitterly. "It is for the man I thought I was loving, the man who never lived."

With the storm of sobs gathering in her throat, she turned to the door to the inner room, and had laid hand on the latch, when, with a sharp cry, he was at her side and gripped her wrist. "But, dear, that was long ago—I have been sorry—Only trust me now." The old winning note was in his voice, and the very fear lest she be won steeled her the more. "You know not how sober they have taught me to be—I'll live rightly—I'll make you happy—"

"You were ever a tall fellow to promise, Kestrel Ferringham."

It was that name on her tongue, as much as the pitiless tone, made him draw back, and she, as he flinched, with recovered control, stood erect against the closed door and waited. When he spoke his voice sounded to him distant: "Only one thing,

Nan. Say it be not for love of me — say I have not deserved — but — but for another reason, marry me." She fronted him with set face and steady eyes; the memory came to him of futile, pitiable arguments he had had with Nate Calderwood, and once more he saw that Calderwood fronted him, and he knew what the end must be. "But what do you know of how the world talks?" he cried, harsh in the realization of his helplessness. "Nan, Nan, let me give you my name, only that. I'll go away, I'll go to Plymouth with Rinyon. I swear I'll never look on you again 'less you send for me. Only take my name."

"Mine own suits me as well," she answered, and a little hard smile touched her lips, though her body trembled. "How will a few words help me? I am shamed already in the eyes of the people here, shamed wherever I go." She turned and, bending her arm against the door, hid her face upon it.

Yet there was no yielding in her body, rather the tense set of her shoulders was in itself enough to hold him off. He drew back and leaned heavily against the table; it was an old table of oak, and the boards were black and rough. He rubbed his hand along one broad seam in the wood. "What mean you to do, then?" he asked, without looking up.

"Stay here at Marshpoint. No girl need starve where serving-wenchs are not to be had. Goodwife Harlowe will feed and shelter me for what I can do with my hands."

"Nan!" he burst out uncontrollably. "Oh, you poor little fool, you know not what you are asking! What it is to sit below the salt, to go up and down another man's stairs! If you'll not let me care for you, I'll write unto your brother."

"I forbid you!" She came quite up to him at the table. "He shall not come to take me back to Meadowcreek — to be cast out of my church — for the women to cry shame on me — Jane Gleason and the rest. If you are a gentleman — I have the right to ask it. I will go my own way. I will lie in mine own bed I have made." Then the sudden spasm swept over

her face; she dropped down on a stool and, casting her arms along the table, hid her head. "Oh, Nate, Bess!" she sobbed. "Home, home!"

It was then he caught her in his arms, though her whole body was tense against his touch. "Let them go, dearest, the whole damned village of canting hypocrites!"

"Stop! They are my people, all I've known, all I've loved, it's my home—"

"Let them go. Marry me—"

She tore out of his hold. "I'll marry you, Christopher Ferringham," she cried, with breaking voice, "when you can carry me home to Meadowcreek."

So it was that in the dull fog of next morning, as Rinyon Crozier and the two Allens were dropping away across the unwrinkled water from Yarmouth wharf, they heard the quick patter of feet on the planking, and out of the mist a voice called to put back. Grumbling, they pulled shoreward over the dead water, and as they lay to by the wharf, a white-faced youth in sorry garments dropped into the boat among them. "A letter from your brother Luke. I'm to go with you, Goodman Allen," he panted, and, stumbling over the thwarts, set himself beside Crozier and grasped one of his oars.

"Ye didn't go to 'Quidnay, Christie?" the Scotchman queried.

"I go with you."

The water trickled heavily from the steady oars. "Then when mean ye to—eh?" Crozier ventured, after a few strokes.

An instant, without answer, Christopher tugged at his oar, then looked up at Crozier. His face was drawn and his eyes were dark with misery, but with a flicker of old dare-devilry he sang beneath his breath:—

"When will ye come hame again, Willie?"

Now, Willie, tell to me.

"When the sun and moon dance on the green,

And that will never be."

CHAPTER XXII

WHO STAND AND WAIT

THE sun that all day long had scorched unflinchingly upon the fields of cane, had dropped behind the shoulder of the great house at Three Winds. The shred of black shade that ran along the blank eastern wall widened to a rectangle, and the three men who sheltered there, shifting their stools languidly, drew farther from one another, though they kept the same relative position to the cedar table. Upon it rested a platter of thin cassavia bread, and, tenderly wrapped in wet cloths, a gallant array of bottles—wine of Fayal, red sack, and, stronger than any sack, the native plantain drink of Barbadoes.

"The wine in itself were enough to commend the shoreward plantations," Major le Gouch, the master of Three Winds, pursued his argument. "In the hills, now, the sun is on your wine ere ever it come to your storehouse, and then it's 'God be wi' you, wine!' eh, neighbor?"

Edward Burrell of Charlesmount, who, for his loud royalist professions, had been dubbed "Cavee" Burrell by the Barbadoes men, looked up with face already flushed: "The air in the hills is more delicate."

"Air? A profitable substance to fill a man's belly!" snorted Le Gouch. He was a thick-necked man of fifty odd, who, as he lolled in his hammock, seemed all a-hunch with fat. His shirt lay open at the throat, and though for respectability's sake his wig rested on a stool hard by, his bald head was uncovered and glistened with perspiration.

"Slife! what need o' the wine of the Dons or the Mounseers when ye have the plantain drink to hand?" cried the third man, in a loud voice that fitted his swaggering attitude and the shabby smartness of his attire. "An I could bear a score o' casks of this nectar into Virginia, or to the Bay Colony, for that matter, for the saints be wondrous thirsty! Last time I was on the coast yonder, ere Stewkley Wasket—the pest rot the flesh from his bones!—stole my ship from under me, I came on a youngster, nephew to one of their godly magistrates, an you'll believe it, would drink you two under the table and never turn a hair. As tall a lad as ever stepped on two legs, and he beat Stewkley Wasket till he could neither stand nor go, God bless him! 'Truth! he'd 'a' killed the knave, had I not stepped in for my sins and plucked him off."

The history of Stewkley Wasket and the loss of the ship *Goodfellow*, Le Gouch had already heard thrice in the four and twenty hours that Captain Wotton had passed at Three Winds; he bluntly shifted the conversation: "What matter was it, Ned, whereof you would speak with me? Out with it briskly, ere we crack the fifth bottle and our wits wash away with it."

"What was it?" Cavee Burrell drew a hand across his blinking eyes. "Oh, ay! Can you name me some honest fellow at the Bridge knows the smith's trade? There's an old forge at Charlesmount—devil fly away with the scurvy halter-sack sold me the place!"

"Delicate air and all!" grinned Le Gouch. "'Should 'a' spoke with me ere you made the bargain fast, neighbor."

"Hang me but my plantation is a good one!" Burrell veered about. "But with the plaguy fever took me at my landing, and the prickly heat that is hell's own torment, I've had scant time to set matters to rights. There're tools to put in order, and the blacks—a wildfire burn 'em!—can but jabber. I want a white man to work that forge for a sennight."

"No need to jog to Bridgetown," Le Gouch took him up. "I've the very man for you. Nay, no bond-servant, so do not

give me a tale of not buying and selling men who served the king you served. This man I'll hire unto you is a free laborer and well able to fend for himself. Alice!"

At the word a white bondwoman came nimbly round the corner of the house and courtesied before them; Le Gouch kept so tight a hand over his men and maids that none stood for a second bidding. "Tell Kit Smith he is to come hither on the run and not be till sundown making himself ready, d'ye hear?" he ordered, in a tone that sent the girl scudding down the low steps from the terrace. The planter's house, a castle at need against revolted slaves and the worse-used white bondmen, stood upon an artificial mound, and twenty paces from the foot of the terrace ran a high prickly hedge of limes. Le Gouch's eyes followed the girl, till she passed out through the gateway into the glare of the open beyond, then he turned with a grin to his comrades: "She's brisk enough, but Kit himself will come only when Heaven pleases."

"Kit?" repeated Wotton. "'Twas a Welsh knave you had six months ago, when I sought you touching my outward voyage. He set me a horseshoe."

"I wish I had the son of Cadwallader now," grunted the planter. "'Was gathered to his fathers, and the ingenio running night and day, and never a one of my thick-skulled boobies knew more than to blow the bellows in the forge. Then a gouge in one of the rollers must break, and we were at standstill, with the ripe canes piling up on the barbecue and no smith nearer than the Bridge, when Providence or the devil hath it that this fellow Kit comes sauntering along by the plantain grove, with his doublet in rags and his head up as he owned Three Winds. A complete smith, he gives himself, so I offer him a new coat and all the kill-devil he can down, an he'll mend that gouge. Not he, my masters! 'I never hire myself for less than a year,' he says very saucy. 'And my wage will be fifteen hundred pounds of sugar, besides plantation allowance.' Fifteen hundred pounds the year, that's stark

robbery!" The purple mounted from Le Gouch's thick neck to his bald forehead. "But what could I do? There was the cane spoiling, and here was a smith right to hand. In the end I gave him a written contract — Kerr, the overseer, had to witness it — and then he fell to. Yes, he did the work and did it well; by midnight we were grinding again. But 'twas a scurvy trick, and he himself is a — Well, see for yourselves; here you have him!"

Through the opening in the lime hedge a well-knit figure in white was approaching at a brisk, effortless stride. Le Gouch, unwieldy in his hammock, gazed on the newcomer jealously: "Free laborer! Lord, I'd give twenty pounds English money to own that rogue clear for five years!"

By that the rogue in question stood at the foot of the steps that mounted the terrace. He wore the regulation garments of a white servant — shirt and drawers of coarse linen, Irish stockings, stout shoes — but in the first careless glance the planter's guests observed that the clothes were clean, and the man himself was clean — a clear-skinned, sunburnt young fellow, with close-cropped yellow-brown hair under his Monmouth cap and steady blue-gray eyes. At that point in the survey Captain Wotton banged down his fist on the table: "Sink me to hell! 'Tis my hard-drinking Puritan swinebuckler!"

Right on his word came the crash of an overthrown stool, as Burrell started to the full height of his six feet, with the cry: "God Almighty! It's little Kester!"

The man at the foot of the steps was not to take his first lesson in the grim endurance of servitude. Not a muscle of his face changed, nor did his level eyes sink. "I am called Kit Ferrers, sirs," he said gravely, plucking off his cap; then turned to Le Gouch: "You had to speak with me, sir?"

Burrell found tongue again: "Major, this man your servant? 'Slife! 'tis monstrous. He is Colonel Ferringham's son, Ferringham that was slain at Marston, a gentleman of as good blood as any in England —"

"I care not if his father were fourteen colonels!" puffed Le Gouch. "He's a tolerable smith — that's all my concern. I'll hire him to you for the next week. Have your tools in readiness betime to-morrow, you, sirrah Kit, and be at Master Burrell's orders. And, harkee, no slippery tricks because of your fine blood. We've had rakehell gentlemen in the Barbadoes ere this and know how to handle 'em."

An instant Edward Burrell almost doubted the accuracy of his identification, for to this insult the blacksmith replied neither with a knockdown blow nor a volley of curses, but with no more than a brief nod clapped on his cap and strode away. The swinging step, the carriage of the broad shoulders, reconfirmed Burrell's first opinion; opposite him Le Gouch snorted a lamentation: gentlemen were the scurriest servants a body could have, they always grew lazy and impudent, he bought thieves and padders in preference; but Burrell, scarcely heeding, repeated, "That was Christopher Ferringham," and Wotton nodded him a confirmation.

So later, after supper, when the land breeze throbbed through the warm air, and the hot tropic moon rode above the palmettoes, Cavee Burrell left Le Gouch and the Captain and strolled away toward the quarters. At the ingenio the work went on all night; in ceaseless file the patient assinegoes were plodding from the fields with their bundles of cane, and from the grinding place sounded the clatter of the great rollers and the shouts of the negroes who drove the cattle in the mill. One shift of men and beasts had just been relieved from duty, and the human portion of it loitered, half-naked and sweaty, by the barbecue where the canes were piled. "Where shall I find the blacksmith, fellow?" Burrell addressed a dilapidated white man, who said with a grin that he'd likely find Kit washing of his shirt, and whistled up a pickaninny to guide the gentleman to the reservoir.

The ingenio and its dependencies, all smother and belching heat, clambered down the hill on Burrell's left hand; the

wooden settlement of smith's forge and carpenter's shop and the great curing-house lay, too, behind him. Yonder in the shadow of the palmettoes he made out the mean huts of the white servants, and, passing them by, came into the noisy negro quarter. "Him dere," spoke pickanniny, and pointed ahead.

In the hollow before Burrell a small pond glimmered under the moonlight, save where the low growth upon the southern bank flung a mass of shadow. Negroes, with black bodies shiny under the yellow light, splashed and paddled in the pool or tumbled on the margin, where several white men, unconcerned, were filling water buckets. A little apart from them all knelt the man whom Burrell sought; he was busily washing some garments; the moonlight, clear as day, fell across his tousled short hair and clean-shaven face, and there was no mistaking him. The planter approached easily through the sand, and when he stood over him, spoke, "Kester!"

Caught off his guard, Kit Smith came to his feet at a jump, and Burrell gripped him into a close embrace with a "Damn your soul! you don't deny me twice in one day."

The blackies, pleased that the gentleman was pleased, cried "Ki-yi!" at this demonstration. The white servants said nothing; the blacksmith had trained them sufficiently some months before, when, on their mocking at his eccentricity of shirt washing, he had held the head of the chief scoffer under water for the space of a hundred seconds.

"And it's you, Kester Ferringham? Death and wounds! Blacksmith here at Le Gouch's! Now you may sink me —" Burrell began to tongue it at last.

"Come away where we can talk," Christopher interrupted, and, tossing his wash, heavy with wet, across his arm, led the way from the reservoir. "Those fellows can take the night air if they choose; they belong to Le Gouch. I belong to myself and like to keep under cover. We'll go sit i' the carpenter's house. 'Tis where I lodge."

Within the shop the single shutter which Christopher opened let in upon the floor a great rectangle of moonlight which brought out every line of workbench and tools, even of the shavings that littered the floor. On the form by the window stood a water bucket; Christopher, dipping the calabash full, offered it first to his guest. "You need have no fear," he grinned. "'Tis fair water. They say the water in the reservoir is pure, the sun sucks it clear; but they who believe may drink of it. I fetched this myself from two mile away." He drank off the draught, and settled himself at ease among the shavings near the form where Burrell was seated. "You see, I'm keeping a temperate diet—"

"Vengeance on your diet!" Burrell's impatience cut him short. "In the devil's name, how came you to this pass? Last I heard—after Elnwick, you remember, and *Cuckold, come dig*—I heard you were at Ferringhurst, your grandsire's heir and the like."

"'Twasn't so," Christopher explained stolidly. "He did but help me into Massachusetts, and I liked not the living there. So last autumn I came into Barbadoes on a sailing vessel. The captain gave me a letter to Lieutenant Manwaring over toward Oistin's, and I worked on his plantation near two months and learned somewhat of their ingenios, and the rest I guess at. But the Lieutenant bought a fellow was fit to be helper to his smith, so he turned me off. Then in February I came to Three Winds—"

"And now 'tis May. I've been with Le Gouch—'tis my best friend, a wildfire on the fat rogue!—three times I've been with him these months. And you, devil wring your stiff neck for you! never spoke. You knew I was in the island, though?"

"I'd heard of Cavee Burrell of Charlesmount. I wasn't sure 'twas my Ned Burrell." The sudden flash of affection that glinted across the sunburnt face recalled the lad of three years before. "Well, an I had been sure, d'ye think I would 'a' come begging to you thus, Ned?"

Burrell vented his opinion of proud, high-stomached rogues in a volley of throaty curses. "But you're coming with me to Charlesmount now— Hold your tongue, pest choke you! Didn't your master bid you, eh? And you're going to stay there. I've a fair plantation in the hills. D'ye mind, after I came clear of that pestilence hole at Elnwick—devil claw the misbegotten knaves put us there!—well, I made shift to get me to my brother's house. 'Tis mine by rights; the Roundhead spawn of hell have robbed me of it and given it unto him. But Dick hath a good heart, after all, a plague on the rascal! 'Helped me into the Low Countries and thereto gave me money to start me in life here in Barbadoes. 'Tis near a year ago I came hither. And I've a fair plantation, and you'll share it, d'ye hear me, you runagate?"

Christopher heard the proffer, both that evening and many times in the week that followed, for, as he had been bidden, he had his tools slung betimes across the back of a favorite assinego and very early next morning was off with Burrell for Charlesmount. Burrell, dragged untimely from his bed, maintained a dumpish silence, till the palmetto-tops of Three Winds were behind them in the morning twilight; then at last, as the rude track began to wind upward into the hills, awoke to the fact that Christopher trudged afoot while he was riding. Ned sputtered curses thereover; the impropriety of the situation was to him but heightened by the victim's complete indifference. Christopher, as sure-footed as the assinego itself, jumped from hummock to hummock of the path and refused Ned's offer to ride and tie, even more resolutely than it was pressed upon him; indeed, he was too content that morning to mind such a trifle as going afoot, for into the flatness of his life had come a friend, one from the rollicking old days, and his presence made all things well.

It was, however, a hard climb to Charlesmount; up and up wound the path, now by a dry gully where the pebbles rolled beneath the horse's feet, now through a stifling hot reach of

woodland, where grew mangroves that dropped gum or sweltering cedars. But as the land rose ever, there came at last athwart the close branches a gleam of the blue water to southward, a breath of the ocean wind, and, about mid-afternoon, Christopher thought to spy, from the open plateau which they were crossing, the roofs of Three Winds, very far below them. Then it was that Burrell, clapping a hand to his shoulder, bade him look forward, and before him, above the Physic trees, he caught the flutter of a royalist red flag. "Yonder lie my lands," bragged Ned. "You'll note there is still one spot in the plantations stands out for King Charles, God bless him!"

An hour later, by a stretch of overgrown path, the travellers came to Charlesmount. It was Christopher's first visit to an upland plantation, and he made his survey with silent disfavor. The narrow acres of ginger and aloes were fenced negligently in the old fashion with tree trunks laid along the ground which now were fast decaying; the negro quarters, but half in use, were going to disrepair; the roof of the storehouse surely leaked, and the door was off the smith's forge.

All untroubled by the squalor about him, Burrell led Christopher into the plantation house. "You are to lodge and eat like a gentleman this week, curse you!" he said hospitably, and proffered tobacco. His fences and roofs might be falling to pieces, but, Christopher noted, it was good Virginia tobacco that he smoked, none of the earthy growth of Barbadoes.

The friends puffed at their pipes in one of the two low, hot rooms of the "great house," while a mulatto wench laid the table. Even in that flood of joyous reminiscence to which he had looked forward, Christopher took note that she wore, instead of the usual garments of canvas, a petticoat of orange tawny and a scarf of green silk folded turban-wise about her head. He noted, too, when they were set at table, that besides the potatoes and poor-john there was a mighty flagon of kill-devil, the crude spirits made of the skimmings of the sugar coppers, to which Burrell devoted himself. But Christopher,

though he ate heartily of the fish, for bone meat was a luxury with which Le Gouch's men were not pampered, put aside the liquor. "What the devil!" cried his host. "Massachusetts, quotha? Why, renounce me but they've turned you into a crop-eared, water-swiggling Puritan! Drink a drop, lad; 'twill not bite ye."

"I'm not thirsty," Christopher daffed him pleasantly, and drew the conversation into safer ways with the everlasting lure of "you remember." They fought over the battle of Worcester, there in the heat of the Barbadian plantation house, and, as the dusk stifled in upon them, they talked, a little lower, of Blandford Carewe and many another good blade, long rusted out in English earth. Ghosts of old comrades stirred in the dark, and while they whispered about him, Christopher felt himself drawn closer to this living old comrade, even though Ned, draining the last of the kill-devil to the memory of Captain Carewe, fell a-whimpering and must be helped to bed.

But in the glare of next day, when the two men faced each other at breakfast, Christopher realized that all the anticipating joy with which he had turned to his friend had flickered out. What a big, unwieldy fellow Ned Burrell had grown! He was not above two and thirty, but he looked gross forty, and the finer, cleaner lines of face and figure which Christopher kept in memory had been coarsened away. His face was puffy-pale with the deep drinking of the past evening; his shabby satin waistcoat was stained with old droppings of liquor, and, in the moments when he ceased tipping, his tongue could find no more than sulky curses. Christopher felt a dull disgust for the ceaseless oaths and coarseness of speech; he left Ned with his mulattress and sick-heartedly went to his labor.

With a strong hand over them, the half-dozen negroes skipped about their work. Before two days were out Christopher had his forge in running order and had begun to tinker the broken tools with which Charlesmount was well supplied. He clambered to the roof of the storehouse, too, and, quite

gratuitously, mended a leak, while Burrell, just come from a nap in his hammock, protested from the ground: "Give over, Kester, a vengeance on you! 'Sdeath! 'tis no labor for a gentleman."

Christopher, sweating on the hot roof, glanced down at the ribald, sodden, lazy swaggerer, as he now knew the man to be, and in a flash of vision he saw with Nan Calderwood's clear eyes. When she had checked him pleadingly and drawn him from this and that speech and thought, had she looked down the years with the terror of such a man as this before her? Ned had not always been thus; three years ago he had been a right good fellow. But he had changed, or was it that Christopher Ferringham himself had changed?

Bewilderedly he realized that his old measurements of men were all in question. That joyous life before Worcester of which his tales had been full, had it been other than debauchery? Would he plunge into it again? The formality and restraint of the Puritan village, had it all been mere cant and hypocrisy? Was he a Puritan as Burrell had taunted him with being—Burrell who knew scarce the name of decency?

Christopher came down from the sweltering roof with his thoughts in a tumult, but amid the upheaval he knew his feet were set in a path from which, Puritan or no, he was not to swerve. In the shock of understanding he had mastered disgust; he did not condemn or even judge now, but Burrell's life and his life, he knew, were laid in different lines. But the very fact that in silence he rejected Burrell's courses, and with Burrell dead Blandford and all that dead life of which he had been a living part, made him very tender of his old friend. Ned, who was giving in the old free fashion of his best to the man whom he judged the same as of old, must never suspect that the real man stood aloof from him.

So Christopher, though he took his own way and set the plantation to rights and would not join Ned over the flagon of kill-devil, was the best comrade man could wish in that week.

He might be hot and outworn with work, but his tongue, albe chaster than in the old days, went as briskly as in the time before Worcester, endless recountings of Blandford Carewe and tales of his adventures in New England that made Burrell, roaring with laughter, forget to drink. All the winningness of glance and tone and infrequent, affectionate gesture that Burrell remembered in the boy was now in the man, till Cavee Burrell hungered for his presence the more, and in peremptory fashion repeated that he was to quit his misbecoming labor at Le Gouch's and share with him at Charlesmount.

Christopher put him off, friendly as he was able, but at last on the sixth night, when they sat at supper, he was cornered into making blunt reply: "I'm thanking you for all your love, Ned; there's no man but you would offer me so much; but my time belongs to Major le Gouch, and to-morrow I must go back to Three Winds."

"Must!" swore Burrell. "What 'must' is there about it? You're a free man; there's no law —"

"There's a law would forfeit my wages, an I broke my contract," Ferringham answered, whereat his friend flared out: "'Swounds! I would that Blandford heard ye prating of wages like a cropped prentice boy. Why, man, an ye'll stay on the plantation with me, the half of all is yours. Does it like you better to slink back to Le Gouch's and eat loblolly and lie in a hovel of withes and bear the overseer's lash?"

"I'd fain see the overseer durst take his cane to me," Christopher smiled. "I'm no bond-laborer, Ned. And I'm not faring so ill. I lie over the shop with Darby Jordan, the carpenter; he's a bondman in his thirteenth year, and flogged and branded, too, for burning of a cane-field, but he's a good fellow to me. We mess together and — and, Ned, don't you see? I'm my own man and beholden to nobody, nor would be again to any one, even to you. There in Massachusetts I was hang-by to a man, my kinsman, and then matters changed, and now it hurts, every crumb of his bread I've swallowed.

Nay, I don't think so ill of you, old lad; you'd not turn me off as he did. But I've made an end of looking to others for food and the roof above me."

Then Burrell, for his heart was set on having his will, put by even his flagon, and argued the matter earnestly: how it were a benefit to him that Christopher, with his skill at handicrafts, for all such knowledge was beneath a gentleman, and his brisk way of making the negroes work, should stay at Charlesmount. Dependence, gratitude? Why, that would lie all on his side.

But Christopher still shook his head, till the older man grew downright abusive at his stubbornness, and then he answered him plainly: "Put case I could give you as much as you gave, still I couldn't cast in my lot at Charlesmount. Look you, Ned, run out as the plantation is, 'twill no more than maintain one man. And I must have more than bread and a shirt; I must lay by something."

"So you've turned pinchfist, that's whither you aim?" repeated Burrell. "'Sdeath!"

He had recourse to the liquor, and the utter contempt of his silence drove Christopher to speech: "You know it is not for myself. But there in Massachusetts—I mean to go thither again one day—there's one I am bound to."

Burrell gripped his arm across the table. "A petticoat in the story, else I lose my wager!" he laughed. "Refuse my soul, I might 'a' guessed! A chopping lad like you, and a tried hand at the trick, I'll stake my head! And for this you'll be putting back to Massachusetts? Why, man, you'd better do as I, and take one like my brown Jocasta here. A woman is a woman—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Christopher, in an odd, throaty voice.

"I crave your pardon." Burrell was sobered. "You're married?"

The remembrance of Nan's piteous "in the sight of God"

made Christopher's set lips relax. "In my own eyes," he answered, and then, spite of the dusk, he saw the mocking uplift of the corner of Burrell's mouth. "Can't you think clean of a woman?" he burst out. "Make an end of that foul sneer. This girl is honest to the soul of her. And she gave up everything, everything, her kindred and her friends and her safe home and her good fame, — everything that a woman loves more than we love, and all to save me from shame."

"Why, 'tis fitting you should be grateful," stumbled Burrell.

"Gratitude?" Something like a laugh choked Christopher's voice. "Why, I love her. Love her so — Look, she sent me away, forever, she said. To stab yourself to the heart, or noose a rope round your throat, that's the approved way to show you love your mistress, is't not? Well, I was ripe to do it. But I sailed on a ship with a friend of mine, as good a comrade as God ever made; we talked of this on the deck at night when we stood the watch. And I love that girl enough to live for her, even at Le Gouch's, even in the heat, with the hard work and the words that hurt. That's why I can't touch the drink or risk the fever that might kill me; that's why I must lay by a few pounds. For some day — she's a woman, Heaven keep her! and her mind may change, and she said she loved me — a time may come when she wants me back, and then I must be ready to go to her, a clean man that can care for her. And, Ned, that's why I must stay at Le Gouch's and work out my own fortunes."

Even to Burrell it was clear now that here was no room for argument, but he generously drank so deep a health to the girl in Massachusetts that his guest must help him reeling ripe to bed. The man still slept, the heavy, sodden sleep of passing drunkenness, when Christopher, in the gray of the morning, took a last look at him and went forth on his way to Three Winds.

The coldest moment before sunrise was past, but in the east gray clouds hid the dawning light, and the air among the

thickets of mangrove was sultry. "We shall get our jackets wet, Mustard," Christopher addressed the assinego, which cocked one long ear at his known voice. Neither Mustard nor Christopher owned a jacket, but wetness they soon had in plenty, for the gray sky began to let down long gray lines of rain that soaked every thread of the man's kenting garments and every hair of the beast's fur. The gullies that a week before had been dry pathways were now rivulets where the travellers went near to falling, and in the more open ground, when the path at length led through the lowlands, the road was deep with mire, and every wayside thicket shed a hot shower that stung on the bare flesh.

So hard was the going that it was early twilight when at last the lope-eared assinego and his drenched driver plodded through the fields at Three Winds and down the miry hill toward the smithy. The carpenter's house stood nearest to the beaten path, and in the doorway, which was on the leeward side, Jordan looked forth. "Back, Kit?" he questioned.

Christopher nodded. "What's been doing, Darby?"

"A shipman called Andrew Wotton sought to speak with ye, morning that ye left for Charlesmount. 'Said you'd find him at Joan Fuller's, at the Bridge. And Kerr is back from the Bridge and fetched in three new men. More damned souls in hell!" Jordan shifted his position against the door-jamb so Christopher had clearer sight of the R branded on his forehead. "One had served a blacksmith. When ye didn't come this morn, Kerr set him in the forge—"

"In my forge?" quoth Christopher, with the indignation of an orderly workman. "Jog along, Mustard."

Striding before the little beast through the soft mud, he reached the smithy, and, with the water dripping from his white garments, stepped in at the open door. The fire was down, and all the low shop was dusky and silent, till out of the gloom before him startled a quavering cry: "God 'a' mercy! 'Twas not I. I did as the Captain bade. 'Twas

Dearmont, 'twas Master Calderwood. I did not hunt ye into the sea."

Christopher's eyes were wonted to the blackness now. Before him he saw the figure of a man that grovelled on the floor, and the white face that was raised at his stern order was the face of Gershom Field.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RACE OF THE SLOW

THE first bewilderment of surprise had swept by Christopher; he stepped to the cowering man and gripped his shoulder. "Cease your whimpering, cease, I say. I'm in the flesh, even as yourself. Feel that hand. 'Tis little like a spirit, eh?"

Field crept to his feet at last and shrank back against the wall, white and shaking, as if the fear of Christopher, the man, was near as strong upon him as the fear of Christopher, the avenging ghost. "But you—but you drowned, master," he stammered. "You and the lass, thof 'twas little harm she had done. Constable Gleason said your blood was on our hands. And the wrath of God hath followed us." He fell a-whimpering half audibly; his wits had never been of the clearest, Christopher reflected, and very like the being flung head-on into a heap of scrap iron had not bettered them.

The remembrance of that bleeding horror made Christopher eye the man more narrowly, drawing closer to him in the dusk, and he started when he saw that a smooch of blood still stained his forehead. "What's wrong with your head, Gershom?"

The other drew a stupid hand across the spot. "A' did beat me for that I knew not to work the forge, that son of Ammon, the overseer."

"His name is Robert Kerr, and if you miscall him out of Scripture he is like to beat you again," Christopher answered coolly. "And you're bond-servant here at Three Winds? How came you hither?"

Field groped along the wall till he reached a form, on which he dropped down with his head in his hands, and Christopher vaulted up on the workbench that stood near him. The forge was dark with the closing twilight and the rain that plashed steadily athwart the open door, so long ere the story was out he could not distinguish the face of the speaker, only the lines of his slouching shoulders and bent head.

"How did I come hither, master? They left us on an island—I know not where—me and Lambert Torry and William Peck. They bound us to trees, but Lambert got loose and freed us. We walked up and down the sand. Lambert went crazed and died. Peck fell down—I know not what came of him. Then Indians were hunting turtles and came in their canoes; they gave me water and meat and bore me away. We fell in with a French ship; I told the captain how it had happened, how they had taken the ship. But when he had brought me unto their town yonder, he did sell me. Yea, the wrath of God is heavy upon us, all of us that laid hand on ye that day. Captain Enoch"—through the dusk Christopher noted the shuddering of the bowed figure—"God 'a' mercy on us all! He shrieked out at the last, when the cord bit into his temples. He hath paid his shot, master; even you'd pity him. And Master Calderwood that led 'em on that day, his boy Jack was with us—"

"Little Jack? And the ship was taken?" Christopher's tongue felt dry within his mouth. "Man alive! what was it happened? Tell me everything." Then, in the realization that he startled the man's shaken wits the more, he mastered himself. "Go back to the beginning, Gershom. You sailed from Meadowcreek? It was in the *Gilliflower*?"

"Yea, master. So soon as Captain Enoch's arm was half mended we put forth. Dearmont Killion—Lord God, hold him in mind!—Dearmont shipped as boatswain. His face was all awry where his jaw was ill set; it is the mark God hath set on him. Captain took me too. For the Constable turned

me out. 'Ye have chose your own master. Now go serve him,' he said. He was an angry man, the Constable, when he came back from eastward and you were gone. He spoke unto the Captain, and the mistress wept, and the Captain would not speak word to his father, even when he sailed. There was a talking all through the village, some one word, some another. Constable said naught without doors. But Master Calderwood, he said the Captain had been in his lawful right in all, and to show he was his friend his own son should sail with him that voyage. Young master had been begging to go to sea and wouldn't mind his book. But when't came to putting forth, I'm thinking he had no love to the Captain, for the day we sailed he came only just ere we weighed anchor, and he had been weeping. His father brought him. 'You have wished it, and now you have your wish,' I heard him say to the lad, very stern."

Christopher gripped the edge of the workbench with fingers that ached. "Go on!" he breathed.

"So we put forth, and 'twas days we sailed, till we were somewhere nigh the Bermoothes, they said. Then we sighted a ship; we thought it had been a merchantman, Virginia bound, but when she was within gunshot she hung out the black flag. She closed with us, yardarm to yardarm; she had eight guns to our four, and they carried us at the first onset. They huddled us together in the waist—all but Captain Enoch; him they had dragged aft—and their captain came and looked on us. A tall, spare devil with one eye gone; they called him Was Stewkley. 'What man o' ye will go upon the grand account wi' us?' says he. 'I'll force none.' And the grin of him would have made the heart sick within you. Three of them stepped forward—Dearmont Killion and Ralph Colcot, and a man from Romney Marsh. 'Fair and easy, sirs!' laughs he. 'Let me know first how far ye dare go in wi' me, bullies. Come, there's your Captain, yonder in the cabin, and he hath a stubborn whim of not telling me whereabouts in the

ship he hath stored what money is aboard. Now what lad of ye will undertake to make him find his tongue?' They took his meaning, and a minute they stood still. Then says Colcot, 'Why, sir, I'll serve ye as any honest sailor might, but I'll be doing no foul hangman's work.' Was Stewkley lifts his hand, and one of his men stood nigh strook Colcot over the head with a curtlexe, and he fell down on the deck. He died that hour. Then Dearmont Killion, with the scar on his jaw a-twitching, cried, 'We be not all such milksops, master,' and fetches Colcot a kick where he lies, and swaggers up to Was Stewkley. 'I'll find your man his tongue,' he swears, 'else he'll go a hot path to hell.' So he did it, sir. He tortured the Captain living, with fire and pointed stick and twisted cord. On the second day he cried out, he told where the money was. They brought him out from the cabin, Dearmont and a Frenchman they called La Mort. He was half gone a'ready, and his face — Well, they heaved him over the rail unto the sharks."

Christopher drew shuddering breath again. "Enoch taught him to turn on a friend to save his own head. He taught him too well. God pity him!"

"Ay, they threw him over to the sharks," babbled Field. "All that were wounded in the fight they threw over. But the sound men, the most of them, said they would join with the pirates. They spared them. Only Torry and Peck and little Calderwood and I, we had no share in the abomination. Some were for tossing us overboard, but it seemed now, by the third day, they had had enow of killing. They drove us to work about the ship — both ships were sailing in company and belike they needed hands — and then in a week's time they sighted this lone island. They ordered us down into the boat. But as we went over the side, Was Stewkley cries, 'Send that whipster back. A' is young enough to make a man of.' Jack Calderwood cries out that he hath no part with murderers, he will go with us; but Stewkley only laughs — he was in good temper that day — and catches him by the arm and flings him

down on the deck. So they rowed us away and landed us on the island, as I told."

"And Jack was left alive in their hands?" Christopher slipped down from the workbench and, leaning against the door-frame, gazed out into the darkness where the rain fell and fell. The spray of it was cold on his face and throat, and clotted in his forelock. "Gershom," he turned at length to his companion, "can you think, what you know of these hell-hounds, do you think there is any hope that the boy still lives?"

But though every detail of the tragedy of the *Gilliflower* was seared on Gershom's dull brain, speculation or deduction was beyond him. Was Stewkley was a devil and Dearmont Killion even deeper damned, this much alone he was sure of; it might suit their whim to let young Calderwood live, or it might not. This was as hopeful a conclusion as Christopher himself had reached; he dismissed Gershom to his quarters, with some advice about keeping himself well covered against the chill of the Barbadian nights, and letting kill-devil alone, then went himself in heavy thought to his lodging over the carpenter's shop.

"'Should 'a' shifted your clothes an hour ago," grunted Jordan, from the black corner where his hammock swung, but Christopher made no reply till he was half out of his wet shirt, when he gave a shout: "A tall fellow with one eye! Was Stewkley, that's but Stewkley Wasket. D'ye mark me, Darby? 'Tis Stewkley Wasket. And didn't you say 'twas Andrew Wotton would see me at the Bridge? O' my life, it all jumps well!"

"You'd best jump into your hammock. Let a man sleep," grumbled his comrade, so Christopher said no more. But all that wakeful night, all the next day in the reek of the smithy, his brain beat and beat on what he had heard—his uncle's ship taken by pirates, Enoch horribly slain, Jack a captive. On the first shock of the story came the instant need of action, the unquestioning resolve to save the boy, if he yet lived.

With the oversweeping pity for the lad and for his mother, mingled other reflections that did not draw Christopher back. How bitter it would be to Calderwood, who had forsaken him in his extreme need, if he must thank his outcast nephew for his son's safety! And Nan, who had loved the boy, surely she would give some sign then. In his old happy fashion Christopher made his desire a thing accomplished, and strode about his work with his head so much higher held even than usual that he narrowly missed bringing down on him the wrath of Overseer Kerr.

He escaped such a calamity, however; when Jordan and Field and near a score of other tight-bridled bondmen were present to take cuffs and curses, the Overseer did not go out of his way to pick quarrels with the free laborer. As a matter of principle, he made some demur, when on Saturday Christopher asked for a written permit to pass the Sunday in Bridge-town and for a sovereign out of his wages, but in the end both permit and money were forthcoming.

The instant the ingenio ceased grinding that afternoon, Christopher banked his fires and marched away for the Bridge. The way was long and the road was deep, and the late rising moon was niggard of light, but, having it to do, he shivered on in his thin garments, till the morning found him loitering through the swampy town to the door of Joan Fuller's famous hostelry. Yes, Captain Wotton was within, the drawer made answer, — no church-goer, he, it was plain — and few moments later Christopher fronted his whilom kidnapper. Wotton looked older and shabbier, he reflected, while the Captain, for his part, took Christopher by the shoulder, and, turning him round, surveyed the kenting garments with a grin: "You'd 'a' made a better hand of it had you cast in your lot with me, brother."

"Fared gallantly, have you? What of Stewkley Wasket, now?" Christopher sent a random shot, the effect of which showed him he had hit aright the identity of Was Stewkley.

For Wotton, at the first breath of the name, fell a-swearing so lustily that he must have a stoup of Canary to cool his throat, and that the wine might not be lonely, he held they were best breakfast at the same time. They had fresh fish, mackerel and red snappers, in a shaded window that looked forth on blue Carlisle Bay, and in the satisfaction of his first good meal in Barbadoes, Christopher forgave Wotton for certain uncomfortable back passages, all the more readily since the Captain seemed not to have thriven.

In the course of the meal all his lamentable story was poured into Christopher's ears, how, not three months out from the eastward where Christopher had quitted him, Stewkley Wasket, at the heel of one of their disagreements, had stirred up a mutiny and, with the most of the crew, possessed himself of the *Goodfellow* and set Wotton and the boatswain, Thorowgood, ashore on an island southward of Virginia. "An ye'd stayed wi' me as I entreated ye," Wotton ended, "it need never 'a' happened. With three or four good men at my back, I'd 'a' trounced Stewkley, devil catch him! and all his firebrands. Or if you'd sailed wi' me, belike I'd 'a' turned him away. A surly, ill-conditioned rogue he was, and ye see how he served me that was ever a good shipmate to him. Bare life was all he left me, and for that he plumed himself mightily on his generosity. Ship and all, if it like ye, even to the very doubt that hung in my cabin and every penny that I had aboard. Stripped me stark, man, and had I not a friend or two in Jamestown helped to furnish me forth, I might be swabbing another man's deck now. As 'tis I'm master of the *Makeshift*, as crazed a ketch as Heaven's miracle ever held afloat, and I'm fetching horses and tobacco from Virginia for a misbegotten band of sugar-growing ruffians here in Barbadoes. And Stewkley Wasket, in my jolly *Goodfellow* with the six guns, he's gone on the grand account. Honest buccaneering, that won't serve his turn. He's making purchase of everything that sails, whatever flag it fly."

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There Christopher held it meet to set forth the story of the *Gilliflower*; he told it earnestly, and his hope strengthened at each curse the Captain vented against Stewkley Wasket, so at the last he struck recklessly whither he aimed: "Look you, Captain Wotton, you've no love to this gallows hath robbed you, and I've no love to him, neither. Why not make a voyage together? You see I'm very fain of your company at last. Now an we took the ship from under him —"

Wotton set down his cup. "You woodcock, have ye no wit at all? Fight Stewkley Wasket, quotha, he in that trim ship of your uncle's with a dozen guns, no doubt, and we in a leaky ketch with one chaser forrard and two six-pound murderers aft? Go to! You're more fool than you were two year ago. D'ye know, my tall fire eater, what I'd do an the devil brought Stewkley Wasket cross my path? Crowd on every inch of canvas the *Makeshift* can carry and run as the foul fiend were at my back."

But though Wotton crushed pitilessly all Christopher's brave, fantastic schemes for rescuing his cousin, he gave practical help when the young man stood upon a sensible tack. Offers of ransom he approved as most likely to redeem Jack Calderwood, so all the hot afternoon the two men, with a bowl of claret punch to cheer them, wrote letters to Stewkley Wasket. It was no easy matter to reach a pirate on the high seas; Christopher, at Wotton's suggestion, prepared writings for Jamestown and St. John's and Tortuga, for every port, in short, at which Wasket might chance to touch, and he superscribed them to Was Stewkley or to Stewkley Wasket, sailing in the *Gilliflower* or in the *Goodfellow* or in some other ship. Within all ran alike: he had heard that a boy named Ferringham Calderwood and known as Jack was in Master Wasket's company, and for his safe delivery any ransom in reason would be paid.

"Where d'ye get the ransom money, Master Blacksmith?" Wotton took the pipe from his mouth to question.

"There's merchantable property walks on my two legs," laughed Christopher. "Barbadoes is a vengeance fine market for white flesh. Le Gouch would pay enough to ransom the boy to own me for a few years. And then the boy's father can ransom me—he's ever been very ready to help me in trouble."

"Write to him now at the outset and let him manage the gear himself," counselled Wotton, but Christopher shook his head: "There's the boy's mother, Captain. If she's given him for dead, it's better not make her hope again when mayhap he'll die to her a second time. When I have him safe 'twill be time enough to write them."

"You're the same rattle-pate came aboard the *Goodfellow*," Wotton said, after an instant of unwonted soberness. "But I'm loath to see you lay your head in another man's gin. Let the gentlewoman fret and write your uncle, rather than risk slaving for the Major. An you sell yourself to him, he'll lay a whip over your shoulders for his pleasure ready as ye were one of his convict servants."

"I could bear it. But I'm fearing there's little danger I'll have to run the risk," Christopher answered, and Wotton could but confirm his fear. He promised, however, that he would bestow the letters, with the slender hope they carried, among shipmen of his acquaintance who would make the various ports; he was far more sympathetic than Christopher had hoped, and even bore the young man company a little way on the road back to Three Winds.

During the walk Wotton urged Christopher to accept a berth upon the *Makeshift*, but he put aside the offer: not only had he learned the unprofitableness of coastwise voyaging, but also, in case Wasket make reply, he must keep some fixed abode in the coming months. So the next morning found him back in the forge at Three Winds, where he took up his work, and, harder still, his old trade of waiting. If it were but to fight! Again and again as the wet summer dragged out its

rejected him for its witchery to creep into his blood. He knew why the tears at last had started to Nan's eyes when she found herself an exile from Meadowcreek — from home.

Poor little girl! The thought of her wrought more powerfully than any drink Jordan could brew; ere a fortnight had passed he pulled himself together and tottered back to work. One day she might need him, so he hammered doggedly in the forge, while the sultry month that at home were mellow October wore away its course. "The New England ships should sail for Barbadoes by now," Christopher told himself. "Next month Rinyon should be here again. He will tell me how it is with her. Or perhaps she will herself send a word."

That hope, long brooded on, grew surety, and so it was that one breathless morning of clear skies, when a strange negro pattered into the forge with a letter for Mars' Kit, his first upleaping thought was of Nan. In the space in which he wiped the grime from his hands, he steeled himself against disappointment by repeating that it could not be from her; there came then a flashing thought that perchance it were news of Jack, and by that the paper was opened. The letters sprawled an uncertain track across the soiled sheet: —

Fever. Come to mee.

Beneath were scrawled Burrell's initials.

In the first reaction of disappointment Christopher told himself that Bully Burrell might die of his fever, for all he cared. Then when the pity that drew him to a one-time comrade asserted itself, he argued practically that his contract held him at Three Winds; he could not throw down his tools and run to this peevish drunkard without forfeiting his pitiful hire, the hire he was to save for Nan. But Christopher was ever a poor hand at practical argument; as soon as money clinked in the matter he grew afraid, all the more since Ned had taunted him with being a crabbed, hoarding fellow.

The end of all his arguing, then, was that four and twenty hours later, after he had swallowed bitter speeches enough from Le Gouch, he set out for Charlesmount. He need not return, his master made curt answer to his proffer, and he need not look to touch a groat of the wages he had forfeited. With the heart sore within him, he stumbled along the rank forest path; he was tired—he had labored hard to finish what work was on hand—and the way was steep, and his year's effort had brought him nothing. When he tripped in a tangle of lush grass and went down, the physical shock of the bruising gave the last touch, and he cursed Burrell with an elaborateness of which his tongue had almost lost the trick.

It was hard on midnight when he limped at last into the fields of Charlesmount. All round him it was black, save for the spark of a candle that quivered in the plantation house, and a flicker of firelight distant by the negro quarters. It was a Sunday night, and the slaves must be at their merry-making, for through the darkness throbbed the monotonous beat of their drums, in endless bearing on one tone which, from the irritation that it was to his weary mood, Christopher felt were torture to a sick man. Tramping through the weeds and ragged brush, he broke in upon the dusky circle at the fireside, and, with a cuff here and a sharp rebuke there and a special chiding for Macow, the headman, sent the slaves to their quarters, before he went on to the great house.

With the ceasing of the drums the silent night seemed to hold breath and listen. From the forest lower on the hillside startled the long cry of a night-bird, and a dog, yonder in the stable, whimpered a howl. The latch of the door jarred sharply under Christopher's hand, and an instant, after he had entered, he stood blinking out of the dark of the main room upon the lighter rectangle of the chamber door. Then with soft patter an indistinct form sprang to his side and seized his hand; the mulatto woman, he knew it was, knelt at his feet with inarticulate whimpering, and from the lighted room

sounded Burrell's querulous voice: "You slut! You pestilence jade! It's he; I know 'twas he made that din of hell to cease. Bring him in, a murrain on ye!"

Christopher put the woman aside and entered the chamber. On the table at the head of the pallet flickered a candle, and under its wavering light Burrell's unshaven face was ghastly-hued and distorted. "Come, are you?" he rasped out. "A fine, upstanding young Puritan, but you did forego a penny's gain at the close. Well, it's happy for you you came. I had the candle ready, and an hour more o' waiting and I'd 'a' thrust it into the flame. Here, take it and keep it!" He groped for the crumpled piece of paper that lay by the candle and held it forth with shaking fingers. "Damn your soul, Kester!" His haggard face twitched on the sudden. "I knew you'd come."

Christopher thrust the paper regardlessly within his shirt; at Burrell's elbow was a jug of liquor that concerned him more just then. He swooped up the kill-devil and conveyed it out of the chamber, spite of the sick man's helpless protests: "Wildfire on ye, Kester! You're bad as Will Powell. A' said I must give up the drink, for all my tongue was shrivelling. Pest on him for a Puritan! You might know he sided with Ayscue and the Roundheads, hell burn him! I'd die alone sooner than have a pestilence rebel here, and so I told him."

Yes, Master Powell of the Cliff had been with the sick man two days before, the mulattress whispered to Christopher's question, but the master quarrelled with him and he went away. Indeed, Christopher scarcely wondered that Master Powell had lost his temper; all that night, while he sat by Burrell in the dark chamber and bathed his head and made him swallow the more harmless drink he had bidden the woman prepare, the man gave him only abuse and insults. But Christopher was patient, and when at last in the blare of uprising day Burrell sank into a stupor, he was glad no sharp reply had escaped him. Even to Christopher's unskilled eye it was plain that death had set its hand on Ned Burrell. And here in the island were

no physicians; the craft of the mulattress and the man's own strength were the sole hopes, while he himself sat helpless. But at least he kept a Puritan Sabbath stillness on the plantation, and since Powell of the Cliff seemed an acquaintance of Burrell's, sent a messenger to summon him again. This done, he could only share the task of the mulatto woman, and all the day, while the sun glared down on the lone plantation house, keep the flies from the blank face of the sick man and fan him patiently.

The night closed in with a hint of rest and coolness. Burrell, to Christopher's thinking, breathed more naturally, so he thought it safe to quit the chamber and stretch himself in a hammock in the main room. It was eight and forty hours since he last lay down, and sleep came to him quickly, with not so much as a first stumbling in dreams. Utter restful blankness swallowed him for unreckoned time, and then, echoing even into the abyss of his sleep, rang the old Cavalier war-cry, "For a King, a King!"

Wide awake, Christopher sprang to the floor that was cold to his bare feet, and in three strides entered the sickroom. Under the wan light of the shaded candle he saw the woman crouching by the pallet, and he saw Burrell, with glazed eyes wide, had dragged himself up on his elbow. Christopher caught him about the body, striving to soothe him with his voice, but the man struggled wildly in his hold. The tenseness of steel was in his frame. "Blandford is down, is down! Charge again, boys, yet once again! Five to our one. We can't make it! God! we can't make it!"

"Hush, Ned!" urged Christopher. "'Tis not Worcester, You're safe here. Don't you know me — Kester Ferringham?"

But the blank voice that now sank to a moan, now shrilled to a war-cry, raved on, while the tense body fought against Christopher's grasp. The desperate effort brought the sweat to Christopher's forehead, and the pity of it all made his throat contract. Ned babbled of a woman now, — not of brown

Jocasta who whimpered by the pallet, an English girl's name was on his tongue. He lay a little quieter, and Christopher, lifting his eyes from the distorted face, saw through the unshuttered window, above the black raggedness of the forest, the steadfast stars. "In a year's time, dear heart," the voice ran on. "We'll have the King on his throne by then. Be-headed! Word o' God! they durst not! At them, boys! Yet once again! *Al estandarte!* Blow the trumpet, rascal! Out steel and at them, at them! For a King, a King, a King!"

Upright on his pallet, Burrell cast his arms aloft, as a man struck by a bullet, then fell back against the watcher's shoulder. A livid hue was on his face, and from his upturned throat came a breathy rattle. The mulattress beat her breasts and broke into a long wail. With sudden tremulousness in all his limbs, Christopher laid Burrell down on the pallet and drew the sheet over his face. "Be quiet, be quiet, wench!" he bade the woman harshly, and, stumbling forth from the chamber, left her with the dead.

The morning had come in with gusty rain from the southwest that tore the leaves from the plantains and scattered water by capfuls in at the uncovered windows, when Powell of the Cliff came plodding through the mire and drew rein at the door. Christopher saw him coming and stepped to the threshold to meet him. At that moment he would have been thankful even of the coldest stranger's presence, but Powell, bettering expectation, proved a comfortable fellow, who made him drink a stout dram of liquor, and treated the whole solemn fact in matter-of-course fashion. "He must be buried by to-morrow morning," he said, as the two sat at their noon meal in the main room. "Send a word to Estwick that is justice in the precinct. I doubt if other planters come to the burying. The roads will run knee-deep with this rain. Yes, Estwick — By the way," he turned suddenly on Christopher, "have you seen aught of the will?"

"What will?" Christopher asked heavily.

"Sure, the one he drew up a week ago when the fever took him. Estwick and I witnessed it in due form. Did he say naught?"

With awakening memory Christopher fumbled within his shirt and, drawing out the crumpled paper, opened it upon the table: —

I Edward Burrell . . . being of sound mind . . . do make Christopher Ferringham known as Kit Ferrers . . . executor of my estate . . . after all debts and claims are quitted . . . to possess Charlesmount and all else as my heir.

"Then it means —" he hesitated.

"It means you stand to gain somewhat by our friend's loss," the other answered, but Christopher scarcely heard him. A mere slip of paper it was, folded within the will, had caught his eye: —

You can marry yr. Girle in Massachewsetts and see you call the firste Boy for Mee.

He crumpled up the paper from Powell's dry gaze, and sat with head downbent. All the grudging with which he had answered the man's summons came back to afflict him; the fact that he was tired and shaken, rather than deeply grieved by the death he had witnessed, was now to him a bitter remorse. With all his grumblings and cursings, Burrell had thought for him and for Nan, and now he lay beyond thanks.

One thing only Christopher could do. He went out into the blowing rain, where the royalist red flag, all tattered with summer storms, writhed a mere wisp, and, dragging it down, he carried it within the chamber and laid it across the breast of the dead Cavalier.

CHAPTER XXIV

DOWN TO THE SEA

A FORTNIGHT later, a young man with rumpled hair sat over his accounts in the main room at Charlesmount. The western sun had slid behind the trees so a tempered light fell upon the littered table by the window, while the corners of the room were shadowy. Already the heat was less, and the first whiff of an evening breeze, straying across the fields of ginger, puffed in at the casement. Burrell's hound, Bonny, wearied of snapping at flies, stretched herself grunting by the master's chair and licked the hand that hung down at his side. Christopher watched her luxuriously. For he felt cool and well content; he was master of himself again, and master of a small property too, and, crowning joy, his accounts were at last made up.

He smiled as he recollected the labor it had been — to estimate the values of standing crops, of negroes, of buildings, to balance against them the claims of this planter and of that upon the estate; it would have amused Calderwood, could he have seen the Kestrel, with his knock-kneed arithmetic, stumbling in such perplexity. For the first time in months the smile rested on Christopher's lips while his thoughts were on his kinsman. He had, indeed, that twilight, a softened feeling for all men, for the accounts, tested again and yet again, resulted hopefully; even when all claims against Burrell were quitted, some eighty pounds would fall to Christopher's share.

The young man clasped hands behind his head, and, leaning back in his chair, gazed out on the sad-hued fields and the dull sky, where a first bat skimmed low. "Eighty pounds, dost hear,

Bonny?" he spoke aloud. "And the creditors cannot press for payment ere the year be out. We'll live on here, eh? till they want us yonder in Massachusetts. We'll set Charlesmount in better trim 'gainst a sale. Mend those roofs that hold out water like a sieve. My word, I need a man to help me, don't I, lass? A white man. And there's that poor devil Jordan. Hang me but I'll buy his time of Le Gouch! 'Tis a good stroke of business any shrewd planter would approve."

It was as a man of strict business, then, that the next sunrise — why delay a reasonable purchase? — Christopher rode away for Three Winds. The last time he went thither from Charlesmount he had spattered on foot in his kenting garments; now he mounted Burrell's horse and had a tolerable doublet to his back. His eyes danced at thought of what Le Gouch would say to this trick of fortune; so busy was he in wondering what reception he would get from the master of the plantation, that he forgot there were others who knew him at Three Winds.

He came awake to that realization when, on his pacing, as befitted a brother planter, to the opening of the prickly hedge that surrounded the plantation house, he recognized in the man who slouched forth to hold his stirrup, his old acquaintance, Gershom Field. With the dispassionate amusement that had served him in intercourse with the man the last months, he surveyed him now; the fellow looked half-starved and wretched. "Much as I felt at Gleason's when this chapman was laying it on," Christopher reflected, and then it was, as he vaulted out of the saddle, that Field looked on him, with hungry, miserable eyes under scowling brows: "Ye'll be going home now, sir?"

Christopher halted, and an instant scanned each hopeless detail of the man. "Devil take you!" he said softly, and turned on his heel. For he knew then, with as absolute conviction as if it had been part of his first plan, that he was

going to buy Field's time, he had to buy it, and that meant ten or twelve pounds less to carry back to Massachusetts.

In none of the sweetest tempers he entered the enclosure and swung up the steps even to the sacred terrace, where Major le Gouch sat over his afternoon bottle. Powell of the Cliff and Justice Estwick by good hap were with him, so the business could be clapped up on the spot before competent witnesses; and it was well, indeed, the transaction was brief, for Le Gouch was pricked out of his usual apathy by the sight of his discarded servant seated at his table, and Christopher had none too much patience with the man who had legally and unequivocally stripped him of his nine months' wages.

Very speedily he found that Le Gouch purposed to cozen him a second time; nothing would suit the planter but that, in return for Jordan's two years of service and Field's four years, he should have the able-bodied negro Macow, a fellow worth thirty pounds. The man was cheating him, and Christopher knew it, and, by the contraction of his lips and the set of his brows, he soon gave Le Gouch to know that he knew. "It is not the custom of gentlemen to cheapen goods," he closed the bargain, none the less, in his old magnificent fashion; but when the Major, frustrated by his promptness, proffered him for the first time the bottle, he shook his head: "I shall not drink with you."

He had risen to his feet, when Le Gouch, in some consternation, struck a new strain: "Look you, Kit,—o' my conscience, the old name comes pat! Pardon me, Master Ferringham,—you're over-hasty in this matter. Mayhap now you're thinking I've over-reached you. Come, I'll do better by you. Say, instead of Macow, you give me just a paltry wench in return for my two men—a fair bargain, you'll bear me out, neighbors? When the wine was in his boiled brains, I've heard poor Ned vapor of his wench Jocasta. Now if you'll sell me her—"

"Were you planning to offer this of your kindness when I

had flung by your first proposal?" smiled Christopher. "Well, Major, you come a day after the fair. I have already spoke with Master Estwick here, and Ned's Jocasta is to have her freedom."

Le Gouch came out of his hammock. "Free her? And she rising two and twenty, a fair, plump wench! I'd have given ye five and twenty pounds. Free the negar? You cursed fool!"

That name Christopher took willingly from no man but Rin-yon Crozier. He hesitated only time for his eyes to dart over the speaker's unwieldy carcass—"Twas like hitting a feather bed," he explained later—then fetched Sebastian le Gouch a satisfying buffet above the belt. The fat rascal threw up his heels in a twinkling and went backward into his hammock, which creaked protestingly. Christopher waited till he gasped with returning breath, then blandly took up the discourse: "If you will order up my horse and my men—my men, sir, just contracted for before witnesses," he checked the other's splutter, "I'll take my leave of Three Winds. And you'll find me at Charlesmount, Major, your servant at whatever weapons you choose to name."

Le Gouch, it proved, chose to name no weapons; to be sure, he had suffered hurt, both in body and in dignity, but on the other hand he had the substantial gains which he had wrung from his assailant, and he cared not to expose all to a rapier prick from the gentleman-blacksmith. Unchallenged, Christopher rode back to Charlesmount, and at his heels went his men, who took the change in their fortunes according to their natures, both surlily, but while Gershom waxed prayerful, Darby Jordan, as they clambered into the hills,—a manifestation of good spirits which Christopher had never known in him—whistled drearily.

Up at Charlesmount the daily life soon slipped along in wonted ruts. There was work, and a plenty of it, for white men and for black on the neglected plantation; there were

three meals each day of fare almost as coarse as that of the bondmen's mess at Three Winds; there were blank evenings that Christopher could shorten only by lying down early in the chamber where Burrell had died. He had the dog Bonny, and at mealtime, after the New England custom, he had his white servants at table with him; but for the rest he was, as in the preceding months, utterly alone. Moreover, missing the hand of ship-captain or of overseer above him, he found it hard to fight off his memories and quiet his hopes with steady labor, and Jordan made it harder by his surly fashion of saying, "Leave that to me, sir," whenever his master took upon himself a piece of heavy work.

But in that climate idleness meant eating and drinking, and what that meant in the long run Christopher had seen, so, after a first vagary or two that left him with lighter pockets and heavier head, he vised himself again to manual labor. The November crops had long been planted, the buildings were in repair, so, other employment failing, he set his men to replacing Burrell's untidy fences with hedges made of shoots of the Physic tree, and in this work he himself took an active part.

One mid-afternoon in January, when the sky was deep azure and the dry heat of the air faintly recalled the clear blue summer of New England, Christopher and Field and one of the negroes were setting the hedge at the westernmost side of the garden. Already the shoots set earlier on the eastern side were putting forth a glossy verdure, and nearer at hand, in the expanse of the field, the ground was hidden by the spreading green of young potato plants and bonavista beans. The red head-kerchief of a negress, busily weeding, flamed amid the green. Christopher, straightening his back from a period of down-bending, had taken in each detail, and, with the sun soothingly warm on the back of his neck, lingered yet a moment ere he stooped again, when yonder by the house he spied one drawing toward him. When he narrowed his eyes and looked

more closely, he saw it was a white man, but taller than Jordan and sparer; then, with a mounting of the heart into his throat, he cast down his spade and strode across the garden. Halfway across he saw the stranger was indeed Rinyon Crozier, come at last, and then, breaking into a run, he vaulted over the new hedge and caught his friend about the neck.

There was enough joy of meeting in the tightness of his hug, but before any syllable of welcome, he broke out: "How is she? You saw her? Rinyon, have ye no word for me?"

"Ay, I'm blithe to be here," Crozier rebukingly answered the question that had not been asked. "We made a slow voyage, and I was main fashed to find ye out." Then he had mercy on the young man. "How soon can ye make up your mails, Christie? You'll journey hame wi' me, I'm thinking."

Christopher took the letter that was tendered him, and turned it half fearfully in his hand. "She hath sent for me, in sober truth?" he repeated. "Come in with me, Rinyon; I'll speak with you soon."

But Crozier sauntered away toward the stable, and quite alone Christopher crossed the sunny yard to the house. A springiness seemed in the ground beneath his feet, but he went deliberately, and once within took time to place a stool by the table ere he sat down and carefully broke the seal. He noted that his fingers shook, and at first the letters danced on the page:—

DEAR CHRISTIE: Come back to me. I am sorry. I have been hard and without charity, I know it well. Yet I would not that you think so ill of me. Remember, dear, when I came into the market place that day and saw you sitting there and I walked by you, I did trust Nate so. I had known him for years, where I had known you but months, and I knew you did not sit there without his consent. And all the summer, all through that time, I did believe him. Nay, it is no defence for me to creep behind poor Nate. I might have believed you, I almost believed you, truly, Christie, I wanted to believe. And now I know everything, why you were at Ziba Trull's

house that night, and how you dispended that money, and how the canoe was wrecked. I have seen Recompense Wheelock. Why did you not tell all unto me, that last day at Marshpoint? And yet if you had gone on your knees a twelvemonth, I doubt if I had trusted you then. But after you were gone— Dear heart, when the white face you wore when you went from me comes back to hurt me, I remember how I wept and wept till my eyes were blinded, and I almost hold we are quits. The fever came on me again, and for days I lay ill at Goodwife Harlowe's house. Then when my mind came back, I found it was not the goodwife tended me, but a young maid. She said that she was Recompense, and she had come to nurse me because I was "Christopher's Nan" he had told her of. I was angered, I would scarce look on her, but she would answer naught, just served me hand and foot while I lay helpless. I had to be friends at last. She told me all that had been between you, and how it had fallen that night at Meadowcreek. She is a good girl, I can see it, for all her strange creed, and little more than child, too. If I had but seen her earlier, I had never suffered you sail unto Barbadoes. Rinyon hath told me somewhat of the island. My darling, to think I sent you thither, that I was so cruel and hard and untrusting! But I loved you. I have no right to ask you to believe me, when I would believe you only when I looked on proofs like any heartless judge. Will you ever forget it, Christie? I can but say I am sorry, and I like no better than the next one to say it, but "sorry" doth not blot out the year is past, and it cannot make me forget how I hurt you and drove you from me. But if you can love me any, after all, come back to me. I shall wait for you and pray for your coming.

YOUR NAN.

When Crozier, after discreet tarrying, entered the house, he found Christopher sitting at the table with his head buried in his arms. He looked up, and his friend took note that his cheek had rested on the opened letter. "I'm your man, Rinyon! How soon doth Alden's ship sail? I'll sell Charlesmount—hang me but I'll give it away! Six weeks should bring us to Plymouth. Rinyon, man, I'll be with her ere the end of March."

In such strain did he talk on till Field, at a standstill in the

work, came in to seek his orders, an apparition that startled Crozier to outspoken amazement. It vexed Christopher that he must cease questioning of Nan to tell over the story of the *Gilliflower*, and he was glad to find the main facts were known to his companion. "Mair than a year since the ship was ta'en, and such news travels," Crozier explained. "Was Stewkley sold a ship in Antigua, — it will have been the *Goodfellow*, I doubt na, — and some of his loons had slipper tongues. So the tale hath rin amang the shipmen even to Cape Cod. But we heard that all in the *Gilliflower* were slain or turned pirates, nae word of young Calderwood. There is hope to save the laddie, then?"

"Why, if letters come from Wasket, they can follow me. In any case, I fear poor Jack is dead ere this," Christopher answered, in the absorbing selfishness of joy. "She was well, then, when you left the Cape? Sixteen months at service in another's house!" The pity of it set him pacing the floor — all the grinding sorrow of monotonous days, of almost unhoping toil, that he had dragged upon this girl. And then she prayed him to forgive her! He drew the letter again from within his shirt; already scraps of the sentences sang themselves through his head, but he wanted the feel of the paper beneath his fingers, the very sight of the black letters.

By eventide, when he and Crozier sat smoking their pipes alone in the dusky main room, he had come a little nearer to the earth, though his talk was still all of Nan. So Rinyon had gone to speak with her just before he sailed? 'Twas royal good of him! And she was well? She had not grown wan and thin with her hard life?

"Nay, they lookit brawly, the baith of them," Crozier answered, and when Christopher forgot his own concerns so far as to look a question at the plural, added: "Wee Recompense, she was with her. She gaes from place to place where she can be of service, and ofttimes she tarries at Marshpoint. Goodman Harlowe died in the simmer, and his goodwife is ailing,

so a mort of labor falls on Mistress Calderwood. And Recompense that is a kindly lassie and loves her wad be with her."

But Christopher heard nothing of Recompense. Nan was laboring hard among strangers! He flung down his pipe and pressed his head against his hand. "Is there no ship sails before Alden's?" he asked. "I must go to her. She wearying herself with scouring and baking! 'Slife! that shall end. I've nigh fifty pounds coming to me, Rinyon, and two men besides. Can I get land still, d'ye think, in Aquidnay? I'll have a house built ere the autumn. Ah, but I've thought on it every night the last three months! She shan't lift her hand to work again 'less it like her, poor little heart!"

He was out of his chair and pacing the floor, but he pulled up short, when in the lighter rectangle of the doorway a black form shaped itself against the dusky sky. "Pardon, sir," spoke Jordan's voice. "A strange negar fetched in a letter and a packet. A' slipped away."

Christopher groped for flint and steel and soon had struck a light. The flame of the candle flickered in the little breeze from the window, and he blinked in the new radiance an instant ere he could read the superscription of the letter. "A strange hand and a cursed poor one!" he remarked, and leisurely broke the seal; then, as his eyes fell on the signature, his fingers gripped the paper fast and his voice grew tense: "It is Stewkley Wasket, and Dearthmont Killion's mark." He bent nearer to the light, and, slowly deciphering the lines, read aloud:—

I send you a token of your kinsman. For ransom I want none, unless you care to lay your own body in his place. Take it to remembrance that had you been less ready with your swashing blows one or two times that you wot of, the boy would have now two ears to his head.

The letter fluttered to the floor, with a rustle audible in the first appalled silence while the two men looked upon each other. Then Christopher drew his knife and cut the strings that bound

the packet; a small box was within, and when he opened it, he saw it was nearly full of coarse salt. He scooped it aside rattlingly with his hand, till he reached what lay within and found that Stewkley Wasket was no jester.

To Crozier who, in the old days, had known this man burst into curses at the slipping of a shoetie, there was a deadly ominousness in the white silence that he kept now. He looked and looked on what lay within the salt; he bent and, taking up the letter, reread it, while the hard lines, hidden all that joyous afternoon, chiselled themselves again about his lips and nostrils. Then he covered up the box and sat down, still white and quiet. "There is one man hates this Wasket," he began in a low voice. "His name is Wotton. He has a ship. Whether or no, he shall help me now. There's the money Burrell left me for the girl in Massachusetts." His hand that rested on the table clenched hard. "I shan't go back with you, Rinyon. I shall fit out a ship and sail forth, and by the light of God! I will lay my two hands on Stewkley Wasket."

Then, as his eyes fell again on the box, the agony that grips a man when, helpless, he sees cruelty acted on a child or a woman, caught him, and he dropped his twitching face between his arms. "Jack!" and "Jack's mother!" Crozier heard him choke.

It was only in the sane light of next morning that the Scotchman ventured anything but grave assent to his friend's outburst. Spite of Christopher's set bearing, he had half believed his promise to seek Wasket was no more than impulse under the first shock of the hideous fact, and he looked up in surprise, when, on rising from breakfast, Christopher bade saddle his horse for the Bridge. "You'll be speiring after Wotton? You have it still in mind, what you swore yesternight?"

"In a hot country, Rinyon, one doth not swear for the pleasure of it," Christopher answered, and tugged on his boothose.

The dumfounded Crozier was left in charge, and away rode the master of Charlesmount, to return only in a week's time, stiff with riding and spattered to the thighs, but with an elate face. "I made query for Andy Wotton at Joan Fuller's," he explained to Rinyon; they were in the one chamber, where Christopher, fresh from a bath and a change of clothes, was shaving luxuriously. "He hath sailed into Antigua, but he should be back by the end of February; they're to send me a messenger the instant the *Makeshift* stands into Carlisle Bay. And I've been to Oistin's and Speght's and to the Hole. I'll lay you thirty to one I've found a man will buy Charlesmount. Those fine new hedges should tickle the trout."

"Then you still purpose to try this mad voyage?" Crozier made his voice impersonal.

"Um," said Christopher, with his chin up.

"Laddie, it's na your concern. Let Calderwood look to his ain bairn. Ye've done your part. Now send a word to him."

"The time for that was a twelvemonth ago." Christopher stropped his razor with swift swinging of the arm. "Now — well, Calderwood hath said ere this that I half did every piece of work; I shan't give him the satisfaction of saying it again. Pest on the damp! This steel is rusting a'ready."

Crozier, sitting close by on the pallet, reached out his hand and caught the active wrist. "Leave your razor, Christie, and hark to me. If ye make this voyage, what of Mistress Calderwood?"

Christopher tore out of his grasp. "You had no right to say it!" he cried, in a voice that made Crozier break out: "Gie over, Christie, gie over! I'll take your place and do what I may to save the lad; there's nane waits for me. And do you gae unto her. Gude faith! ye've earned the right."

Christopher turned again to the glass; there was a twitching in his fingers so he durst not attempt shaving at once, but his voice was steady: "You're the best fellow ever lived,

Rinyon. But I can't shoulder my load on your back. What face should I wear to her, an she asked me where I left my cousin? If I had not written, if he were not kin to me, they had never hacked him so." He faced his friend, with a smile that tightened his lips: "And d'ye think another than myself shall have the joy of slitting Stewkley Wasket's throat?"

So in the days that followed Crozier made no further argument, though he could not but note that Christopher, in the midst of his varied concerns and in the full tide of brisk chatter with which he took compensation for his months of loneliness, had his moments of snappish silence, even of sulkiness. Once he surprised him with Nan's letter opened in his hands. "I must write unto her," he said to Rinyon, too sunk in wretchedness to try any poor concealment. "I shall have to tell her 'twill be a month or two longer. When doth your ship sail, Rinyon? You'll bear a word to her?"

"Haud your tongue!" Crozier made concise answer. "Ye ken well I sail wi' you."

Indeed, Captain Alden sailed back to Plymouth without his trusted mate, and in his care went a letter for Mistress Anne Wood at Marshpoint. It was a short letter, and almost cold in Christopher's desire not to tell her all the weary days and the danger that yet must hold them apart. He would come home, if Heaven would let him, and he loved her—that he repeated—but urgent affairs stayed him. "'Twill be time enough to write her all when we put forth to sea," he confided to Crozier, and in this postponement his friend read the piteous hope that yet somehow, by some sleight of fate, the task to which he pledged himself might be avoided, and that letter of farewell remain unwritten.

But meantime Christopher kept steadfastly to the path he had marked out; negotiations for the sale of Charlesmount went forward, guns and men for a fighting cruise were quietly looked out, the price of ship's stores was studied, and almost weekly he or Crozier was at the Bridge, in case tidings came of Cap-

tain Wotton. Though as the days rolled away and the plan of action, often thought upon, showed all its absurdity, Christopher himself grew outspokenly dubious. "'Tis a droll freak, isn't it, to ask a man lend you his ship and himself?" he admitted to Crozier. "But I've no credit; I've not money enough to buy and fit even a pinnace. Wotton must help me. On my word, I'll make him!"

To that end he procured a bale of dice and, since Crozier would never touch such tools, passed long afternoons in gaming for ha'penny stakes with the mystified Jordan. "Back to your old trade?" Crozier was surprised into spoken disapproval the first time he found him at such practice, and Christopher looked up at him with a quick laugh of realization: "'Twould be a shrewd turn an my old accursed trade proved the one to save Calderwood's boy. D'ye think his pious father would accept him, an he were won by a cast of the spotted bones?"

Yet even Christopher's impudent courage quailed, when at last the message came to Charlesmount that Wotton was at the Bridge, and he found himself setting out to meet the Captain. He insisted on Crozier's coming with him on a borrowed horse, and, to tell truth, he suffered their pace to slacken, for all that the roads in this dry season were at their best. Wotton's earlier reception of his hints at coöperation recurred with depressing clearness, and long ere the roofs of Bridgetown huddled into sight, he had given over his attempt to keep up a swaggering port before his friend. "'Twill need all my huffing vein to bear me out with the Captain," he said with a dolorous smile, as his last sorry jest cracked in twain.

For all the anxiety of the moment, it was both a wonder and an amusement to Crozier to note the bland demeanor which the young man assumed when he met Andrew Wotton. He wanted to quit the Captain for the breakfast he had had at their last encounter, he said, with the old off-hand good-fellowship, and sent the drawers running, and chaffed the

serving-wenches, and had his joke even with Mistress Fuller herself. They made a leisurely meal, half dinner, half supper, in the same old chamber that looked out upon the Bay, where the waters shoreward were darkening with late afternoon shadow. There was wine in plenty to wash down the fish, and Christopher was as kindly attentive to keep Wotton's cup filled as Wotton had been to him in the cabin of the *Goodfellow*. That episode could not fail to come up, and the loss of the vessel and Wasket's villany were poured into Crozier's ears. At the heel of that Christopher slid naturally into an account of Wasket's reply to his letter, but Wotton, though he volleyed forth oaths at his former mate's gratuitous barbarity — "all of a piece with the rest of his conduct," — took a second cutting of the mackerel and changed the subject.

Crozier, watching the game, gave a slight, helpless shrug, but Christopher, for all his first hope of aid volunteered in an outburst of indignation was shattered, followed unflinching as the Captain led. His talk — brag, rather, — was now all of Charlesmount and the money at his command, till at last, as they sat over the wine, he cried: "Come, Captain, back in the *Goodfellow* ye've sat with me at the dice when you had naught to win. Say that you try a main with me now that we stand on even ground."

"'Struth! you know where to have me, Kester," laughed the other. "Bring out your dice and I am for you."

The dice were brought out, a bale that was borrowed from the house that all might be above suspicion. To the same end, Christopher insisted that, since Crozier was present, Wotton should bring in some friend of his to see fair play. By the time the Captain had ferreted out and fetched in his old boat-swain, Thorowgood, the twilight was thickening in the room, though on the Bay a touch of the waning sunset yet lingered; so it was under soft candlelight that the gamesters sat down to their play.

At first it was the merest trifling, a crown piece a side, with

fortune now with one, now with the other. Christopher, not all designedly, played ill because of the twitching nervousness that shook his hand, but as main after main was thrown, he slowly got the mastery of himself. A desperate coolness came upon him, and with it the feeling that his tense hand could not falter, nor his steady eyes fail him. It was hot in the room, he realized, and he slipped off his doublet and opened his shirt for his better ease, while Wotton still had recourse to the wine. Night had closed in earnest, and the dark Bay stirred beneath the open window. Across the water twinkled the lights on the high poops of the ships that rode at anchor, and clear on the hushed air came the creak of oar on thole-pin, as a belated boat crept home.

Still the play kept on, for the most part in Wotton's favor, till the Captain grew loud and boastful: "'Swounds! the handling of a sledge hath stiffened your fingers. Play up as ye used, Kester."

"'Tis scarce worth the trouble for such paltry stakes," yawned Christopher, with eyes half veiled.

"Set what stakes you please. 'Slife! d'ye hold me afeard?"

"I don't want to strip you," the young fellow demurred, and then, when his protest was hooted down, reckoned off: "What with the land and the negroes—I'll leave it to Rinyon here if I'm not worth a good fifty pounds. I'll lay all against your fifty, Captain."

Wotton pushed by his wine cup. "That smacks aright. One-third of the *Makeshift* against your fifty pounds. Have at you, now!"

The dice rattled in the box and clicked forth on the table. "Cinq and tray," spoke Wotton, and Christopher, with a sudden dryness in his throat, shook swiftly, lest courage go, and made his cast. The double fives turned upward.

"Now," he said at once, "I will throw with you again, my fifty pounds and the third of the *Makeshift* I have won 'gainst t'other two-thirds."

Wotton ceased swearing and scanned his antagonist, then smote down his fist on the table. "Now renounce me to hell! Was this what ye've had in mind all the day, to win my ship from under me?"

Christopher nodded, with a close-lipped smile under his slender mustache: "I am going to fight Stewkley Wasket, Captain, as I asked you ten months ago."

"You can't fight him in a piece of a ship," the other taunted, and, throwing by his box, rose from the table. But the fever of gaming now was in his veins, and he had not made three grumbling turns across the room before he came back to his old place. "Look you, my galliard, I don't want the money and I can thrive without the ship, mayhap, but I'd like mightily to give you one lesson. Ay, I'll throw with you, but atop of ship and money you must put your swashing self into the balance. Come, you bragged of selling yourself at need to Le Gouch. Dare you risk it now?"

An instant Christopher hesitated, with questioning eyes on the roisterer before him; then he spoke, with a monotonous cadence in his voice: "You must go into the scales yourself, then, Captain; that's fair. The loser shall serve the winner for a twelvemonth. We've witnesses here. Will you clap hands and call't a bargain?"

They shook hands across the table. The candle flames now flickered tall above the guttering wax, and a night wind came in at the open casement. Within the tavern a door jarred to, and faintly from the street sounded the bellman's call, "Eleven a'clock and a cloudy night!"

Christopher shook the dice, with mind a resolute blank, and unswervingly cast them. "Tray and deuce!" Wotton shouted, ere Christopher could focus his eyes on the black spots. "By the light of Heaven! I'll nick you this time, Kester. Twelve months' service you've bound yourself to, eh? On my word, 'twill serve you rightly for the neat gin you laid for me if I make you to smart a little when I get you!"

"Ay, when you get me," Christopher forced a stolid answer, though he did not look at Wotton. He felt the touch of Crozier's hand on his neck, as the Scotchman, standing behind him, laid his arm about his shoulders, and, thrusting up his hand, he gripped Rinyon's wrist and waited. Through the window beyond Wotton he saw the sky very black. "Nan's God!" the desperate prayer cried itself within him. "Help me now, and I'll never touch the dice again, an it displease Thee!"

He heard the smart clap with which Wotton's box met the table, but he durst not turn his eyes whither the dice fell, till right together came an oath from the Captain and a sharp outcry from Rinyon: "Ace and tray! Seek ye anither servant, sir."

Christopher brought his eyes back from the dark window, just in time to see Wotton send his dicebox crashing to the farther side of the room. He laughed outright, the louder for his adversary's hot curses, and, springing to his feet, filled the cups round. "Tut, tut! No ill-feeling, Andy Wotton. I won't make you to smart, man. Sail the *Makeshift* as master. Rinyon here ships as my master's mate," — he turned to his friend, and in the glance took note that Rinyon's wrist was red where he had grasped it, — "I sail as fighting captain, and we'll trounce that halter-sack Wasket and his mate Killion too. Here, boys, drink off to our good voyage!"

But Wotton, silent at last, threw back his head and rose to his feet. "You're a fool and a madman, and you'll be the death of us all," he said slowly. "But 'struth! I'd as lief die under your rattle-headed leadership as another. So before you drink to the voyage, mates, I'll bid ye drink to the Captain — to Captain Ferringham!"

CHAPTER XXV

TO THE TUNE OF "JOHN DORY"

IT was in the fickle heat of mid-April that, in Christopher's rueful phrase, "Charlesmount put to sea." Not only did the treasured fifty pounds which came to him from the sale of the plantation leave port in the form of ship's stores and stout guns, but the Charlesmount men were enrolled among the *Makeshift's* crew. Jordan, a handy fellow with tools, and, above all, trustworthy, was shipped as carpenter, and Field served before the mast. Much comfort Christopher took in those two and in his old friend, now his boatswain, Thorowgood, for the most of his company were as rakehellly a lot as ever hauled at the ropes — ex-bondmen from the sugar plantations, scarred, battered, and bestialized; soft-spoken, sly-eyed mulattoes; sunburnt ruffians, Irish, French, and English, the riffraff of the islands, who ere this had tried their hand at buccaneering on the Main.

"Ye can't look for sober men with settled rents to sail into hell-mouth," Wotton grumbled. It was, indeed, a venture for none but desperate fellows. The *Makeshift* was but a small ship, heavily overmanned with her two score odd of sailors, mounted with guns to the danger limit, — Wotton swore the first volley would rip up her decks, — and to that a slow sailer.

"We'll not be using our legs in a bout with the *Gilliflower*," Christopher laughed down that last objection. "When we meet her we'll fight perforce." A resolute show of high spirits was with him a matter of conscience in the days before the

ship put forth. Men failed him, supplies failed him, the winds were unfavorable, but with set good temper or occasional effective outburst he struggled through all that was to do. But Crozier, who lodged with him, noted that he got possession of an armful of books and at night when he was sleepless read greedily; plainly, he had no wish for solitary thought.

Crozier was with him, too, the evening before the *Makeshift* sailed, when Christopher settled himself at the narrow table in their room at Joan Fuller's to write his long-deferred last letter to Nan Calderwood. The Scotchman was lying upon his pallet, face to the wall, so he did not see his comrade; but he heard the scratch of the pen, now feverish fast, now with long pauses, he heard Christopher's heavy breathing, and on the wall he saw how his huge shadow huddled low above the table.

The last long silence so weighed on him that he rose, and found Christopher, with drawn mouth and averted eyes, busied in sealing his letter. "Droll to think on, isn't it?" he greeted Rinyon in a studiously hard voice. "This scrap of paper will cross the water, 'twill come to her, her hand will touch it, while I —" He fell to whistling between his teeth.

"Y'are a brave fellow!" Crozier let slip.

"Brave?" Christopher cast his arms wide. "I came down along the pier this afternoon. There was a ship bound into the Bay was making sail. I set my foot on the gang-plank. I thought to hide myself aboard. That's how brave I am, Rinyon. I lay awake yesternight and prayed the livelong time that the *Makeshift* might sink at her moorings. That's your bravery! For I can't draw back till I've done all I can do. And she is waiting for me there at Marshpoint!" He got to his feet and began pacing the room.

The candle on the table had guttered out another inch of wax before Crozier, always aware of that monotonous tramping, ventured to raise his head from the bolster and order: "Lie down, ye daftie! I canna sleep to your tune. And there's work to do the morn."

Christopher turned and looked on him. "Ay, ay, mate. I must be fresh against to-morrow," he said at last, and, quenching the light, lay down. In the dark Crozier could hear him tossing to and fro in his bed.

But he was in hardy spirits next day. He had never talked louder in the strain to raise an echoing laugh than that noon, when he drank his last glass with those Barbadians who had learned to know him and came now to wish him God-speed. Powell of the Cliff was among them, and it was to Powell that he gave the dog Bonny, and intrusted the letter to Marsh-point that was not to be sent thither till midsummer. "Please God, I'll be there before it!" Christopher said, with a shadow in his eyes; then turned to be merry with his guests again.

They attended him, the half-dozen planters and shipmen, down to the pier where the longboat waited him, and he rowed away across the ruffled water in the breezy afternoon. The wind brought him their shouts: "Good speed to you!" "Good booty and a safe return!" and it brought him, too, a resounding bellow from Justice Estwick, who was lamentably overcome with wine: "The easiest bed in hell, Kester!"

Christopher heard that drunken prophecy of truth, and, looking across the blue water to the *Makeshift*, he saw in his mind's eye the *Gilliflower*, a larger, trimmer ship, a readier sailer. He set his lips hard, and, without looking at Crozier, who sat beside him, pressed his hand down on his friend's knee. Then the longboat lay to by the gangway-ladder, and Captain Ferringham had gained his quarterdeck. Forward the windlass creaked amid the stamp of feet, and men were hauling at the ropes; they worked rather silently, Christopher noted; here or there some dare-devil raised his voice, but many of the faces were sullen and more than one was wistfully turned toward the white shore. But the anchor was weighed, and the sails were set, and the breeze swelled the gray canvas; the shore astern shrank down into the water, and ahead blue Carlisle Bay opened into the wide sea. "And so, sir," growled

Wotton, who had himself taken the helm, "we're off, for better or for worse."

"For better," Christopher repeated, with grim resolution to trick himself as well as his followers. In the determination to throttle black thoughts with work, he went as early as the next morning to drilling his men. At present he was their captain only by virtue of a paper privateer's commission that had cost him ten pieces of eight, and he had to base his authority on some firmer foundation. Those first days brought him the opportunity. A French ship heaved in sight, and a portion of the hopeful crew, headed by a certain loud-mouthed Teague O'Connor, were hot for indiscriminate attack and pillage. "You will not fight till you fall in with the ship I seek, and then you'll have enough fighting to content you," Christopher answered them smilingly; and since Wotton, who declared himself "mere sailing master," would give no aid but to hold the course as the Captain bade, went down into the waist himself, with his few loyal men, and laid O'Connor and two other stout fellows in the bilboes. "The next time you'll stand up at the gratings," he gave them fair warning.

After that, some of the men held him worth truckling to. One sandy-haired rogue, who had learned that Christopher was a king's man, sought to curry favor by swearing he had been at Drogheda and taken and sold into Barbadoes. "If they were all like you that fought in Ireland, I do not wonder Noll Cromwell knocked 'em over their ugly heads," Christopher answered him. "But they weren't like you, you two-legged libel. March forward now, and Drogheda me no more Droghedas." The man went, and those who heard sniggered, loudest of them all O'Connor, new come from the bilboes, who dubbed the crestfallen one by a name that stuck to him, Drogheda Will.

But even in such an ill-assorted company there were some, Christopher found, whom he could trust. There was a man named Tarling and one or two others, come in from the old

coasting crew of the *Makeshift*, who might serve as leaven in the lump of iniquity, and the master gunner, Manus Tench, an old buccaneer with a white seam of scar across his cheek, appeared a reliable man. In any case, he knew his trade, and was Christopher's right hand in the training of the guns' crews.

What with drilling his topmen and his gunners and devising tasks for those who grumbled, Christopher was busier than the loudest murmurer of them all, yet he found space to piece out the haphazard knowledge he had gained on Blandford Carewe's ship with some practical study of navigation. Wotton thrust Crozier aside and himself instructed his leader; he was a skilled navigator, Christopher realized, as he himself came to know more of the matter, and, after all, a good comrade. Still, however much he grew to like Wotton, Christopher wavered not at all in his allegiance to his tried friend Crozier. By tacit agreement they seldom spoke of Marshpoint, but they talked cheerfully of all they had ever done together and of the books they had read. It pleased Christopher that Rin-yon, through all his fortunes, had kept the Horace he gave him, and it was a soothing sight, while that black-a-vised crew were growling on the forecastle deck and the sails were hanging lifeless and Wotton was cursing for a breeze, to hear Crozier, stretched on the cabin locker, read calmly of the awakening spring and the grazing herds.

But Crozier had to drop his book on occasion to give earnest encouragement to his friend, for of a truth the outcome of the expedition was dubious. The first unspoken question, "Shall I come away victor over Wasket?" had now changed with Christopher to an even more harassing one, "Shall I ever get within striking distance of him?" The *Makeshift* touched at Antigua and got there no news of him they sought, then steered away to northward, whither in the spring the pirate craft were wont to turn. Morning after morning Christopher looked out upon a naked horizon, while with an empty heart he told

himself that Wasket might have sailed for the South Sea or gone a-buccaneering into Panama. Again, he might have been sunk in the sea, or even if he yet were roving on the Main, the boy whom they hoped to rescue might be dead. "An Wasket wished to rid him of the lad, 'twere as easy for him to send ye his head as his ears," Crozier always combated that fear. "Mark my word, ye'll find the callant alive. Nae doubt he is brisk and handy, and for that they kept him at the first and still will keep him."

Crozier proved a true prophet in this, when at last the *Makeshift* had tidings of her quarry. Late in June they stood in at the Bermudas to take fresh water and provisions, a process which forced Christopher to look upon his shrunken store of money. Already the men were grumbling loudly of the wasted days, and Wotton, even that morning, had ventured to speak of steering southward for a time. Christopher rowed ashore under a weight of perplexity that hardened his face, and there upon the beach he got from the barelegged colonists the news he dared not hope to hear: not three weeks before a ship called the *Revenge* that from her description he knew for the old *Gilliflower*, had stood in thither to water. Her captain openly proclaimed himself as Was Stewkley, her quartermaster was a dark young man whom they called Crook-Jaw Killion, and among those who attended them ashore was a nearly grown lad whose ears had been cropped away.

The *Makeshift* swung out to sea with the wind of the next dawning, and even the surliest grumbler in the forecastle was silent now, intent on watching the horizon. The Captain had promised a ryall of eight—his last coin, had the crew but known it—to the man who first should sight the *Revenge*, and if close watching and much wishing could have fetched the ship, she surely would have heaved in sight. But a week of days ran out, and another week upon it,—days of limitless sea and unwinking sky that Christopher grew to hate,—and then at last, about the seventeenth afternoon, Teague O'Connor

at the masthead shouted joyously, "Sail upon the weather bow, sir!"

Wotton shaped the course thither, but even before Christopher could shout to clear the deck for action, O'Connor, in a smaller voice, called out that the stranger was no ship, just a paltry hoy. The sudden tension in the company slackened, and the Captain turned his back and went to lean upon the taffrail; but since the hoy, as the lookout presently read her signals, was in distress, common humanity as well as the desire for news made them bear down upon her. The breeze was fair, so ere the hour ran out the two vessels lay within hail, the hoy had lowered her boat, and her squat Dutch master, received with due courtesy at the *Makeshift's* gangway, had gone below with Captain Ferringham.

For an idle half-hour the *Makeshift's* crew hung over the bulwark and tried to talk with the stolid Dutch oarsmen or chaffed O'Connor about the money he thought he had earned, and then the Captain came on deck with his guest. He was bareheaded, and beneath the sea-tan the blood was pulsing red in his cheeks. "Boatswain, lower away a cask of water into Mynheer's boat," he bade. "O'Connor, here's for you!" It was the promised ryall that he tossed the Irishman before he strode away to the quarterdeck.

At most times Christopher was careful of his bearing toward Rinyon in public, but now, when he had stridden to his mate's side, he unregardfully flung his arm about his neck. "O' my life, we have 'em, Rinyon!" he cried. "But yesterday Wasket and the *Revenge* fell foul of this craft—'tis a New Amsterdam ship from the Indies. The master hath given me his reckoning. They took from him a seaman and all the water casks and rum—rum, man, six hogsheads of it, and Dearmont is one of their officers! What case d'ye think they are in for a fight by now? Given into our hands, lad, into our hands!"

The news ran through the ship like fire through powder,

and almost ere the Dutchman quitted the deck, the ketch was brought about and stood southward where the *Revenge* had been encountered. It was a night of full moon that tipped the waves with a phosphorescent gleam and glittered on the burnished guns that lined the *Makeshift's* sides. As if it were broad day, men came and went and cleared the cumbered deck for action, while they sang and scuffled in the joyous expectation of the conflict. Christopher, who had gone down into the gunroom to see that the powder and shot were where they could be had most readily, was clambering up the black ladder, when he caught a gay word from O'Connor: "Being if they don't dhrink up every dhrop of that rum, we'll be roaring dhrunk to-marra night, bhoys."

Christopher's fingers clenched the round of the ladder. His sweet crew and divers hogsheads of rum—the peril of the combination had not occurred to him. Now for a black instant the sense of danger beyond danger clutched him, till he stepped forth again upon the gleaming deck, where the very air breathed a consciousness of the fight to come that killed every other foreboding.

So the night wore out, and the sun, shining over the water, found the *Makeshift*, with decks bare and clean guns ready, still heading southward. Wotton, with a chart in his hand, came up to Christopher on the quarterdeck and explained to him by this and by that how they would surely fetch up the pirate ere noon, but Christopher heard it all vaguely, and fell to pacing the deck again, up and down, with a glance at each turn round the bright horizon. He found that he was humming:—

“ ‘John Dory bought him an ambling nag.’ ”

“D’ye mind the tune, Master?” He halted again at Wotton’s elbow. “Stewkley and I sang it together once in your cabin, you’ll remember, and to-day we’ll sing it again.”

For in the mind of no man on the *Makeshift* was there a

doubt but that the long search was over. Already in the waist the hotter-headed ones were stripping for the fight, and Christopher, leaving the deck to Wotton, went below to seek his buff coat and steel cap; it would be his part to lead the boarders, and there defensive armor might profit him more than any sword. In the cabin he found Crozier, seated in his shirt-sleeves at the table, where he was fitting new flints to a brace of pistols; his back was to the open port-hole, so, though the cabin was bright with sunshine from off the blue water, his face was dark. "A little time and we'll be lamming 'em now!" rejoiced Christopher, while he busied himself with his steel cap; it felt hot and tight, and he bubbled over with curses upon it ere he dashed it by and took his wonted felt hat. Then he realized that Crozier sat silent over his pistols, though they were all fitted now, and he drew up to him and slapped him on the shoulder: "What are you in the dumps this day for, Dominie?"

"Will you be sad for once, Christie?" the older man answered. "Before we go intil the fight, I want ye to promise me ane thing in all steadfastness. If ye come back to Marshpoint —"

"When I come back to Marshpoint," Christopher amended.

The other gave a smile in which his eyes bore no part. "Aweel, when ye come back. But little Recompense, will ye na look to her, Christie? She's but a young lassie to fend for hersel; I hae looked to her as I could. I tauld her I held her as my sister, and she suffered me. But I had it in mind, something more than sister, an she could like of it, when I came back."

"Well said!" cried Christopher. "Why didn't you speak it out to me before? My faith! I can see the two of us tilling farms that lie side by side —"

"Now hush!" Crozier interrupted. "I prayed ye to care for her. I misdoubt if I ever come hame."

In the little instant while Christopher gazed upon his friend

there sounded from above the cry of the lookout, "Sail upon the lee bow!" and the two men in the cabin could hear upon the deck the thud of rushing feet. Crozier sprang up, and Christopher, stripping off his doublet in a turn of the hand, reached for his buff coat. But even yet his thought was with Crozier, and he heard himself begging: "But what do you mean, Rinyon? What old woman's prattle is this?"

"I dreamed a dream this morn," the Scotchman answered, with his foot upon the companion-way. "Nay, dinna shake your head, lad. 'Tis true dreams when they come before the dawn. I saw mysel lie in a bloody sark. So ye maun look to Recompense for me."

He turned steadfastly up the companion-way, and Christopher, with his coat half on, sprang after him. On the deck the sunlight flooded warmly, and men, loud in unchecked speech, swarmed to the side, for to leeward showed the white sails of a great ship that was bending her course to meet them. "Look you there, look you there now!" chuckled Wotton. "Damme but 'tis a tailor hath her helm! Drunk? Mad drunk, every Jack of 'em. 'Twill be a sweet fight, Kester—sir." He yelled an order that the ketch be stripped into her fighting sails, and himself took the helm. "We have the wind of them, d'ye mark?" he cried. "'Slife! we'll bang 'em into bits. Lord, Lord, that I could bear a hand in the muss! See to't ye give Stewkley one lick for me."

Christopher nodded without speaking. His eyes had ranged from Crozier's figure, upon the forecastle deck, clean-shouldered against the glaring sky, to the great ship that ever drew nearer. He could make out the black rag that fluttered at her masthead. He thrust his hand into his shirt and drew forth Nan's deeply-creased letter; he would never fall alive into Wasket's and Killion's hands, but they might fumble over his dead body, so he shredded the paper to atoms. Down in the waist his men, too, waited in silence. One who stood at the foot of the companion-ladder fingered his cutlass with

hands that shook, and the lips of another moved as with forgotten prayer.

Then, as Christopher sent his scraps of paper fluttering over the side, there sounded across the tumbling water the boom of a great gun. A little gray cloud hung upon the side of the *Revenge*, and almost at the same instant came a splash, and a milky jet of foam spouted up some forty feet to leeward of the *Makeshift*. Silent yet the ketch held onward, silent save for the deep breathing of her waiting crew. Larger and larger towered the black side of the *Revenge*, and from her forecastle deck smoke belched once more. A dull crash echoed amidships, and a shower of splinters flew from the bulwark of the waist, so that some of the men scuffled back. "Your charge, Gunner!" Captain Ferringham's voice rang high.

It seemed to him long space, yet he had counted scarce three heart-strokes ere the bow chaser spoke, and right on the roar of the shot he heard a cheer from the gun's crew. Then the ketch shivered through all her bulk, as the guns amidships and in the steerage volleyed in their turn, and the pirate gave reply. Right below him, in the eddying gray smoke, Christopher heard a man shriek aloud, and, with heart contracting, he told himself they had the worse. But the *Revenge*, he found, no longer lay to leeward. They were a berth beyond her on the unvexed water; the smoke cleared; and though on the main deck one man stood with the stump of his arm dripping, upon the quarterdeck the crew of the stern chaser yelled in triumph.

"Good lads!" Wotton bellowed with equal excitement. "'Tis their rudder is crippled!"

Yarely the *Makeshift* tacked and came about, while the big *Revenge* rolled cumbrously between the waves. Once more they edged in with her, and Christopher felt his blood pound fast as, at his word, one after one the guns boomed. Up in the tops the small arms rattled, and shot for shot the enemy replied. He saw a limp body pitch from the masthead and,

with ghastly likeness to life, catch an instant at the shrouds ere it dashed upon the deck. Once the bulwark at his side was struck so the splinters flew round him, and when they slipped out at last from the smoke into the blue noon, where the sun eyed them, he found a sliver of the wood must have struck him, for his forehead was bleeding.

As he was tying his handkerchief about his head, Tarling ran up to him with word that the ship was aleak, so they fell off the wind while Jordan went over the side to repair the damage. It was a strange, unrestful lull in the midst of the struggle; Christopher thought of it afterward as the most unreal hour of all that unreal day. Overhead the sky, where the sun began now to slope westward, was quiet blue, and the *Revenge*, a half-mile astern, rocked as idly as a fisher-craft on the blue water. But the decks of the *Makeshift* showed dark, wet patches, and four men had been carried, maimed and groaning, into the cabin. Christopher tied up one sailor's shattered leg, and, still in that haze that seemed to numb his brain while the outer man did his part so perfectly, bade wash down the decks and serve out the noon rations to the men. He himself ate with a wolfish hunger, for all his hands were bloody. He had moved up alongside Crozier by the taffrail, and he heard himself jesting, in a voice that throbbed in a higher key than his own, "Your bloody shirt is fair as mine, Rinyon, fairer, 'struth!"

Crozier looked beyond him and his lips moved. "Ay, ay, I was praying, Christie," he said unquestioned. "'Tis the sole way I ken to ask the help o' the Lord in battle — standing up with a sword at my side."

The leak was stopped, and Wotton had the tiller, and the *Makeshift* came up into the wind. Again they stood in to meet the *Revenge*, and the blue sky went out in the rolling smoke, and the lap of the sea-water was lost in the crash of guns and the splintering of timber. The air was noisome with the stench of powder, and through all the smoke blazed the

unwinking sun. Christopher had cast by his coat, in the fury of the heat, and had sprung down to help work the murderer amidships. The gunner had fallen, and they had to thrust aside his still quivering body ere they could serve his piece. The two ships lay near, so near that the *Makeshift's* men could hear from the pirate's deck shouts of defiance and what seemed a yell of drunken song, and they could see the muzzles of the *Revenge's* guns yawning black through the reek. Yet the *Makeshift* stayed right in the thick of the battle, while the enemy's fire raked her; and then at Christopher's elbow shrilled the voice of the ship-boy: "The Master is down, sir! Master Crozier hath the helm!"

With Wotton, their skilled sailing master, went the advantage of the long-range fight, Christopher knew well, and ere he could make head against that first ill fortune, Thorowgood pushed up to him. "We are hit between wind and water, sir. We leak again," the Boatswain gave the second stroke.

The murderer amidships where he had labored boomed aloud. Christopher flashed a glance at the overtopping ship of the enemy, and across the deck of his own leaking craft where a half-score men were outstretched. It was only hand-to-hand fighting could save them now. "Lay her aboard amidships, Rinyon!" he trumpeted through his hands. "Lay aft for boarding, all!"

High as the *Revenge* towered, they could board her best from the raised quarterdeck of the *Makeshift*. Thither Christopher scrambled, with near a score of boarders at his heels. The companion-ladder was slippery, and a man from the stern chaser's crew lay limply at its head, with his shoulders drooping over it. But Crozier, untouched, stood steadily at the helm, and the ketch was edging in to close with her foe. The smoke, billowing from the chase gun, hid the boarders; the grappling irons caught and held.

One last glimpse of his quarterdeck Christopher had through the smoke, and he saw Wotton lying where he had fallen.

His back must have been broken, for he had dragged himself up on his elbow and his legs trailed helplessly. "Good lad, Kester!" his voice quavered. "Give him one blow for me!"

Christopher leaped to the bulwark, and, catching at the shrouds of the *Revenge*, swung down to her deck. He was singing happily, he realized: —

"Run up, my boy, unto the main top,
And look what thou canst spy-a,"

and his sword was out in beautiful close fight, and men were reeling down upon him. One mad fellow he noted, naked to the waist, powder-smear'd, gloriously drunk, who struck wildly at him; and he dropped him, with his shoulder all one gory gash, before he closed with the next man. This one was grimly sober, and he wore a red cap set low over his black brows. Christopher ran him through to the last verse of *John Dory*, and made for the fore-castle deck. There was yelling and shouting all about him, and the stamp of heavy sea-boots; his own men were at his back, and the *Revenge's* rakehells swirled from their path like yellow leaves.

But on the fore-castle deck one little knot still gathered round the bow chaser, and the linstock was glowing, ready to pour another charge into the fast-settling *Makeshift*. A flash of swords was in the boarders' eyes, and a pistol barked out of the brown of the fore-castle deck. One man at Christopher's side spun half round and thudded down by the foremast, but Christopher plunged forward. Among the crew of the chaser he had spied a black-bearded fellow in a gay red coat, and he went up the steps to the fore-castle deck at one bound. "Drunk again, Dearmont!" he shouted.

Killion was staggering where he stood, with a half-drained bottle in one hand and in the other a crazed sword swinging round the circle, but, besotted as he was, he knew the Kestrel, and pitched forward to meet him. Once again the comrades of the hemmel were at hand-grips. To right and left other blades

were flickering, and there was that charged gun that must not pour its shot into the *Makeshift*. Christopher smote swiftly, and heard Dearmont's thick curses and the clatter of the pirate's sword as it struck the deck; he sent him reeling flat with a blow of his fist, and, rushing forward, cut down the man who held the linstock.

He faced about now, and looked back across the deck of the *Revenge*. The battle was over. Here and there fierce hand-to-hand scuffles still were fought out, but the pirate's guns were silent, and Crozier and the last sound ones of the *Makeshift's* crew were dropping over the bulwark into the waist. Then Christopher looked on Dearmont, who had rolled over where he fell and was groping for his bottle. "Secure that fellow," he bade O'Connor, who, one of a hard-breathing trio, had kept at his heels; and he himself went down to the main deck. He almost stumbled over a man who lay face upward at the door of the galley; there was no wound upon him, and, looking closer, Christopher perceived it was a drunken stupor in which he slept. Aft of the foremast stood a hogshead with one end staved in; Christopher sucked in his nether lip, while his mind darted back to O'Connor's words of the night before.

Then through the yells and groans that made the red deck clamorous he heard an outcry in a strange tongue, and by the after hatchway saw Drogheda Will, with his knife at the throat of a sailor who screamed in Dutch that he was a true man. Christopher pounced upon his follower. "Don't you see 'tis the man they took from the hoy, you fool?" he shouted. The Dutchman clung to him with terrified pleadings which he cut short with a question in the man's own language: "The rum they took from your ship—tell me quick where they've stored it!"

There were five hogsheads below in the hold; the Captain made them store it there at last; the Quartermaster broached one; he said every man should be drunk—

Christopher pushed the man aside and strode to meet Cro-

zier. "Do you take the deck, keep the men busied, find Jack." His words stumbled in his haste. "Nay, do not ask me whither I go."

He gave a last glance to the quarterdeck, where Tench and the hottest of his followers were struggling with the last handful of the pirates, then he swung down into the dimness of the after hatchway. At the foot of the ladder he found the carpenter's room and laid hand on an axe, then clambered onward down into blackness that ever thickened. He slipped on the slimy rounds of the ladder, and his eyes ached with straining into the dark. Once the heart choked in him, as he fancied he heard a footstep on the deck above, and he thought on what shrift would be given him, if his crew took him in the act of destroying the rum. Then he smothered a startled oath, for he had slipped off the ladder and found himself ankle-deep in ill-smelling bilge water. The hogsheads, however, he discovered by groping with his hands, were clear from the wet, on skids that raised them some three feet from the bottom of the hold. Wanted a little to the darkness now, he made out the dim lines of the great casks, and, swinging the axe to his shoulder, he struck with all his strength.

An instant a ghastly fear gripped him: What if it were water, not rum, he should waste? but the smell of the stuff reassured him. Two hogsheads, three hogsheads, he staved, and then he halted, with axe upraised and the sweat clammy on his forehead. He had heard the ladder creak under a swift tread.

From the farther dark of the hold into which he had worked, he could see, when he turned to the ladder, the lighter square of the hatchway, and faintly for a little space below it. There he had sight of a single slender figure leaping down, and then he heard some one splashing through the bilge water toward him. Pressed back against a hogshead, he waited with breath indrawn, till the newcomer reeled against him and with a cry of terror dropped at his feet. "Hold your tongue!" rasped Christopher, clutching his shoulder, and strove to clap a hand

over his mouth. In the dark his hand touched the side of the man's head, and at that the cry broke from him, "Jack, Jack!"

One instant he forgot the hogsheads and the rum and the raging crew above deck, for he had his arm about his cousin, and the boy was clinging to him, sobbing and choking: "Damme, I knew you'd come, Kester! Stewkley knew it too, pest on him! When he saw 'twas you on the quarterdeck, when you got the upper hand of him, a' would have killed me. I hid on the orlop. A' was seeking me, right at my heels. Hark!"

Once more the ladder creaked. In the dim light Christopher saw a man's lank figure swing down into the hold and felt that it stood to peer on him. A breathing space the hold was quite silent, save for the gurgle of the rum that ran from the broken casks; then he heard the swish of water, as the intruder's dark figure drew toward the place where he sheltered. Christopher felt Jack's fingers clutch into his arm and heard a breathy sob rattle in the boy's throat.

"There, are ye?" came Stewkley Wasket's voice out of the darkness. "And Ferringham—hell burn him!—is on the main deck. 'Swounds! he shall take ye in collops. Out hither, you skulking dog, you—"

Christopher thrust Jack behind him, and, a step forward in the chill water, lunged at the groping figure. "Y'are mistaken, Stewkley," he laughed. "Ferringham is here."

His blade struck the pirate's blade, and on the click a spark flew. He saw the black figure swerve, with a swash of water, and knew the curses that bubbled in its throat had choked away. Once again the unseen swords clicked and caught, locked in tierce. Christopher, still with the little laugh moving his lips, unlocked his blade and let it lick up beyond his adversary's hilt. He heard a sharp splash, as of a sword let fall, felt that his point held an instant so he must jerk to bring it clear; then he saw a black muffled thing pitching away into the deepest dark of the hold.

He splashed after, humming, he realized, humming the tune of *John Dory*. The blackness thickened as he came in among the casks. The space would be narrow, so it were hard to swing a sword. He sheathed his blade and drew his dagger. "Turn about, if you be not coward," he laughed. "I have a gift to give you back, Stewkley Wasket."

There he nearly fell, as his knees came in contact with a skid on which, his outstretched hand told him, a cask lay on its side. "Come up and see if I be coward," panted Wasket's voice from behind it.

Christopher clapped hand to the cask, ready to vault up. Something stung through the hand, nailing it to the cask, and, raging with the pain, he scrambled to the top. He felt hands clutch at his throat, but he had one hand free and it held a knife. He swung his arm clear and stabbed behind the arms that caught at him. "One blow for old Wotton, two for Jack's ears!" he sang, and at the third the fingers clutching his shirt relaxed, and with a gurgling cry the pirate went down.

An instant Christopher sat astride the cask and drew hard breaths, then, with a mighty nerving of himself, he put his right hand on the knife which pinned his left and with a great jerk hauled it forth. That done, he slid down on the far side of the cask, but when he would have seen if Wasket still lived, he found his body, rolling backward, lay face down in the mingled rum and foul water.

There was work to do, yes, Christopher remembered jerkily. "The axe, Jack. Here to my voice," he spoke, splashing toward the boy. "There're two more hogsheads of the stuff. Here, strike here, lad, hard as you can, and here."

The strokes were wavering and unsteady, for Jack still was sobbing through clenched teeth, but the work was done, and the rum was wasting gayly, ere they heard thunderous steps on the orlop above. Christopher snatched the axe from his cousin and tossed it into the wreck of the last hogshead, just

as the glare of a lantern swept through the black hold, and in the hatchway showed the white faces and naked shoulders of a half-dozen of his crew. "Rum! rum!" bawled the voices of the hindmost, but Tench, in the lead, halted short.

"You see what he's done?" Christopher shrilled, and with his dripping left hand pointed to the sodden thing in the foul pool that had been Stewkley Wasket. "A' hath cheated us of half our purchase. Sneaked down here, curse him! and was staving of the last cask when this lad brought me hither."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DREAM BEFORE THE DAWN

CHRISTOPHER sat upon the after hatch, with his bleeding head on his sound hand and his elbow on his knee. As the ship rolled slowly between the waves, he had a sight of the western sun that tipped the surface of the water, and it was red like a drop of blood. They were carrying by him to the cabin shattered figures of men that groaned, and when he turned away his eyes, he saw a red trail marked the deck at his feet.

Some one touched his arm — Jordan, he realized, after an instant of stupid staring, and it was Jordan who had helped him stumbling up the ladder from the hold. "Your hand's hurt, sir." At the word Christopher looked dully at his left hand and saw that it oozed blood. "Shall I fetch the surgeon? Ay, surgeon, sir. 'Was serving the pirates; they forced him from a merchantman."

With an effort that sent a physical tremor through his shaken body, Christopher regained the mastery of himself. "I can wait best of any, Darby. Fetch water and a rag. You can tie up my head and my hand so 'twill serve."

The cruel sting of salt water on the raw wounds tortured him back to full consciousness. Amidships he noted the sullen squad of prisoners that drooped under guard, and near at hand Gershom Field, with his shirt caked to his side, was hauling down the black flag from the mainmast and muttering of abomination. Then the scuff of feet close by made him look round, and over him stood Jack Calderwood. "Do you

not want a coat, sir?" the boy asked, with adoration in his look.

For the first time Christopher was aware that his shirt hung in shreds, so he was gladly drawing on the proffered garment, when he noted that it was a buff coat with faded red linings. "Whose coat, Jack?" he cried sharply. "What came of Enoch Gleason's clothes?"

"Yes, 'twas his," the lad nodded. "Was Stewkley — rot him! — took his clothes. A' was too tall to wear 'em, so they lay in the chest, but after Killion had his favor and he made him quartermaster, he gave 'em to him. I took no note. Shall I fetch you another doublet?"

Christopher shook his head, — the times were too busy to permit him the luxury of small squeamishnesses; he fastened the dead Captain's coat across his chest and went to do his part in the work. The *Makeshift*, he found, was leaking beyond hope of recovery and settling fast; Crozier and his watch had already got out the wounded and were laboring now to save the ammunition and the stores. The task next in importance, Christopher looked himself to the securing of the prisoners. There were three and twenty of them, he counted with dismay, besides almost another score, too desperately hurt to be a menace, whom he bade lay in the great cabin along with the wounded of the *Makeshift's* crew. Of the sound ones, a few had been taken with arms in their hands, but the most of them were dragged helplessly drunk from obscure corners where they had lain through the fight. But the stupor would not last many hours, Christopher knew, and Killion, with his black beard and crooked jaw, so limp and helpless now, was not the man whom he wished to find again with able-bodied followers at his back. So he had the prisoners huddled down into the black lazaretto and chained hand and foot, till irons failed and ropes must be used; he bade hang by the ladder a lantern that should light every corner of the pit; and at the hatchway he stationed one of his steadiest men with a brace of pistols.

By the time he mounted to the deck again, the swift twilight had closed in, but a splendid moon was rising over the eastern water, and the ship was light as by day. The odor of cooking came already from the galley, and the deck was a-slop with clean salt water. Up in the roundhouse that was to be the Captain's quarters Christopher found Jack, white-faced in the smoky lantern light, who was trying to make tidy the disordered bunks and the shattered lockers. "Crook-Jaw was stramashing here this morning till Was Stewkley — burn him! — threw him out," he explained. "And one o' your men, cousin, your master gunner, was seeking booty in the lockers till Rinyon Crozier came on him. So your man Tarling stood guard till I relieved him. Look you, there's money, a double handful of broad pieces, here in this corner, and papers."

Christopher took the little packet: an expired privateer's commission, a merchantman's papers—he had no time to search further, for just then Crozier came in, so he clapped the papers into his inner coat-pocket and sat down with him to supper. Jack fetched it to them, hard fare enough, ship biscuit and salt beef and brackish water, so thorough had been Christopher's destruction of headier liquor; some dozen bottles of wine were stored below in an unobtrusive locker, the experienced Jack hinted, but Christopher bade save them for the wounded men. His food needed no relish that night other than the consciousness of the day's achievement. They had paid roundly for their victory: the *Makeshift*, cast off from the *Revenge's* side, thrust up into the moonlight no more than her bare masts and shattered taffrail; a heavier loss than any ship, Andrew Wotton lay stark in her cabin, with eleven good fellows of his crew to bear him company; and aboard the *Revenge* were another half-score wounded, some of whom would scarce wear out the night. But it was victory: Was-ket's dishonored body had gone over the side; Killion and his mates were under hatches; and Jack Calderwood, hale and sound, stood at Christopher's elbow while he ate.

Better than all, perhaps, Crozier sat opposite him, without so much as a scratch to show he had been in the fight; Christopher was magnanimous, and did not twit him with the dream that had held him in fear for his friend all day, but Crozier remembered it and spoke rather sheepishly: "You've taken the knocks for us baith, after all, Christie. Let me stand the first watch to-night and do you go sleep. You look as you craved it."

But when Christopher was left alone in the roundhouse, he felt no inclination to sleep. A few moments he lay wide-eyed in his bunk, while he watched the dim lantern glow vie with the white moonlight in the narrow room, and harked to the insistent tap-tap of hammers at the stern, where the sailors, profiting by the calm sea, were mending the rudder. Then, realizing the uselessness, in his high-strung condition, of trying to sleep, he got up and, seating himself at the table, fell to examining Wasket's papers. A good handful he drew from within his coat, but the privateer's commission which he most wished to scan was not among them, and a rip in the bottom of the pocket told whither it had travelled.

Off came the coat, and then, eying the place more closely, Christopher saw the pocket had given way before this; the bottom in which the hole was worn was made of a bluish patch, while the rest of the lining was faded red. "A pretty piece of needlework!" he muttered. "And the commission, that will be cruising about within the lining. Have at their stitches, now!"

His knife went ripping down the under-arm seam, and a great piece of the lining came away in his grasp. There was the commission, and there, bedded in the bottom seam, clung another bit of paper. He took it up curiously; it had stuck there many months, for the parchment was dirty yellow, and, when he sought to open it, the deeply-worn creases almost tore apart. But within he saw black writing that still was clear — and then he rubbed his eyes and drew his hand along

the table. He could see straight; he was wide awake; yet when he looked again at the paper, he saw that it contained indeed words that he himself had once written:—

GODE UNCLE: I doe claime yr. promise.

Syllable by syllable he read the letter he had sent to Calderwood from his prison, even down to those last almost illegible words:—

I cannot beare this they would putt upon mee. For God his love helpe.

The letter and the hand that held it dropped to the table. Out through the open door Christopher stared upon the white deck and the moonlit water, unseeingly, while before his eyes dazzled the yellow sand of the Meadowcreek market place. He saw the sharp lines of cottage thatch and meeting-house roof against the blue sky; he felt the pitiless grip of the stocks upon his ankles; once more, spite of the healing months, his face burned as he met the mocking eyes of his neighbors. And Calderwood, who had promised him aid, who would have given it, had he realized he was humbled, could never have known that he begged for help!

At the utter purposelessness of this that he had been made to suffer, a spasm of anger seized Christopher. "Wounded or not!" he muttered, and, staying only to get another coat, into the breast of which he buttoned the letter, went in quest of Gershorn Field.

In the great cabin where the wounded were laid, the bespattered surgeon and the grumbling shipmen who aided him were too desperately busied even to heed their Captain. Christopher snatched down one of the evil-smelling lanterns that flared from the beam overhead; he had a sickening after-recollection of the ghastly faces which the light flashed forth from the blood-sodden floor; then he had threaded his way among them, and opened the slit-like door of the nearest sleeping-cuddy. Chance

had led him aright; within the narrow bunk Gershom Field lay, face to the wall. Christopher put his bandaged hand on his shoulder. "Wake up!" he spoke softly, but something in his tone thrilled the sleeper; Gershom stirred and turned frightened eyes upon him. "You hear me?" Christopher still spoke softly. "You are wounded; perchance you will die. Now as you hope for salvation, answer me truly: that letter I gave you for my uncle the day before they put me to shame in Meadowcreek,—what did you with that letter?"

The man blinked at the lantern light that fell on his face. "The letter, master? Your letter? I gave un to Calderwood."

"That is the lie, yes." Christopher bent over him. "Now I want the truth. Answer me."

"Do na look on me so, sir." Gershom shrank back with arm upraised. "I tell 'ee truth. I good as gave un to Calderwood. Captain Enoch, he took it—"

"Ah!" Christopher caught a clicking breath. "Tell it me, Gershom, all you recall," he spoke more gently.

"'Tis long ago, master. But I remember. I took your letter. I started to Master Calderwood's after the work was done. Beyond Elder Jeanison's house 'twas, the Captain came up wi' me. He asked me where did I go? and I telled him I bore a letter to Master Calderwood. And he says he goes that way and will bear it, so I give un to him. Then he looks and says 'tis not his father's hand, and I telled him how you wrote it, and he begins to snigger and says he, 'So he's whining for help, is he?' and he turns the letter over and over in his hand, and then he claps it into his pocket and walks away. And next morning early when I went to the cow-shed, he comes out after me a-whistling, and he says he wouldn't have you to boast that he'd run of your errands, he says for me to tell you that I gave the letter into your uncle's own hands. You've no need to keep good faith with evil-livers, he says. And he gives me two shillings to say it. It did not

work ye harm, sir?" the man added, after an instant: "I wronged ye enough wi'out more."

"You've done naught wittingly, Gershom," Christopher forced out the words. "Sleep well."

He clambered slowly to his quarters, and, lying down again in his bunk, watched the shadows that swayed across the floor. Within his coat his fingers groped and touched that undelivered letter. He thought of Nan, laboring those weary months among strangers; it need never have been — his shame and his flight and her brave casting in of her lot with his — had he gone to serve Calderwood, as he prayed, as Calderwood, he felt, would have permitted him. He thought of Jack, serving his father's old servant, enduring abuse, mutilation, Jack who had been forced to sea to prove his father's confidence in Enoch Gleason. And Enoch, who had stayed that poor letter, who had read it, no doubt, and laughed and gloated over its useless submission — it was here on this ship that he had suffered hideous death at the hands of the man whom his hatred of Christopher had linked to him. "God!" Christopher drew sharp breath. "I am not sorry for him."

It had been his habit to tell many matters to Rinyon Crozier, but this matter of the letter he had never breathed to him. Even now he made no mention of it; no one should know of that letter, he made the resolve, while he kept the deck in the middle watch of that night, no one save the man for whom it had been written. As soon as they reached port, Jack should carry the letter to his father; Calderwood should know what manner of man was honest Captain Enoch, and he should know that his nephew had not been the stubborn sinner that he deemed him. Perhaps the knowledge would cost the ex-Magistrate a pang, and Christopher, though he must acquit his kinsman now of the main charge of heartless breach of faith, remembered too well the happenings of the day when he was hunted out of Meadowcreek, to wish to spare him.

But he had little time to think on Calderwood and the letter

and all that might have been, in the hurry and confusion of the day that dawned. The leaks in the *Revenge* were stopped and the rudder was in order, so by noon they were ready to hoist sail and away to Boston. For it was thither that Christopher and Rinyon determined to shape their course. It would take them but little longer to reach Boston than to reach Jamestown, and in the Bay they would be among people friendly to the captured vessel's owners, while in Virginia the Cavaliers might not prove complaisant to Calderwood and his Puritan fellows. "I'd like Gleason and Calderwood to get back their ship as easily as might be, and yet give us our prize money," Christopher offered an ostensible reason for steering northward.

Neither he nor Rinyon named it aloud, what a keen contrast there would be between their abject departure from the Bay and their return in the recaptured ship, with Calderwood's son beside them and the murderer of Enoch Gleason chained in the lazaretto, but it was in the thoughts of both. When Crozier wondered if they could make shift to navigate the vessel so far, Christopher was very sure they could; and when Christopher, in his turn, grew dubious about provisions and water, should they meet with head winds, Crozier was immediately hopeful.

In the end they laughed and shook hands upon the Boston voyage, and that afternoon stood away to northward. But ere the sails were set, they fired the stern chaser three times over the place where last night the mainmast of the *Makeshift* had shown, and for a space, when the homeward wake was rippling behind them, Christopher gazed back at the unmarked spot in the wide sea.

Yet even for so honest a comrade as Wotton at the last had proved himself, Christopher could not keep heavy thoughts for long. There was work to do aboard ship, in which he wanted his share, though Crozier, who seemed troubled about his wounded hand, would have had him keep quiet. But nothing short of a broken leg would have held Christopher in one place

on that ship, his uncle's ship, that in the old days they had not deemed him worthy to set foot in, that now was his by right of the strong hand. He explored her from stem to stern — all but the hold; he did not care to go down into the hold again. Wasket had made few changes in the craft, save the significant one of placing the magazine aft beneath the great cabin, with which it was connected by a scuttle and a ladder. Another evidence that the pirate captain had scant confidence in his crew lay in the fact that he had not stored his small arms below, but stacked them in the roundhouse where he lodged. Christopher kept the same arrangement, though he had no suspicion of his men; they had stood by him well, and some of the ugliest had gone down in the fight. His company had indeed suffered heavily; it mustered now but seven and twenty men, even when Christopher counted among them the surgeon and the Dutch sailor, rescued from the pirates, and Jack Calderwood.

Somewhat because he was short-handed and somewhat because he wanted to keep the boy in sight, Christopher bade his cousin serve him in the roundhouse. Half in amusement, half in pity, he tried to look at the lad through Calderwood's eyes. Eighteen months on a pirate ship had not bettered Jack; at fluent blasphemy he rivalled Christopher in his most unbridled moods; he took tobacco like a veteran, and, as soon as he felt acquainted with his cousin, expressed a thrifty sorrow that it had been necessary to waste that good rum. By his own telling he had not fared so ill among the pirates; of Wasket and Killion, who had actually mutilated him, he spoke savagely, but among the crew there had been various stripes of men, and some, after their fashion, had treated him kindly. He showed his cousin, with much pride, an anchor which one of the men had tattooed upon his lean brown arm; and once when Christopher missed him, he found him in the great cabin by one of the mortally wounded prisoners. He'd been a good friend to him, Jack made surly answer to his cousin's well-meant questions.

Yet the boy was eager enough for home, though shy, now all was well, of saying it. He asked with interest where Nan had gone and how Christopher came thither, and he told in his turn of the excitement in Meadowcreek that followed the Kestrel's flight,—how Calderwood had sent messengers up and down the coast, even to Plymouth, and how the village had well-nigh given the fugitives for drowned, and some began to shake their heads and hint that in this last affray Kester Ferringham had been unjustly treated. His father and the Constable had had a sharp disagreement over the right of the matter, Jack said, and Christopher's heart went out to Gleason. He would see him soon; he would not go to Meadowcreek, of course, but while the trial of the pirates held him in Boston, surely Gleason would seek him out. Calderwood, too, in simple decency must come to thank him. Christopher heaved the log every hour and watched the full sails as earnestly as if his mere will could bring the ship the swifter into port.

On the third morning, to Christopher's bitter disgust, the wind died down, but they had made good progress up to now, so, determined to be cheerful, he profited by the smooth sea to paint out the name *Revenge* and letter the ship anew the *Gilliflower*; as she came out from Massachusetts Bay, she should go back. Full of the thought of that return, he had sauntered along the quarterdeck to the companion-ladder, when the master gunner, Tench, came with a civil request for a word with him. Christopher bade the man up on the quarterdeck; he noted that those upon the main deck all found work to bring them aft, and he shouted to them to go forward ere he listened to the Master Gunner.

The first word shocked him out of his contented musings. Whither was their course? the man questioned bluntly, and went on in swift, low speech: He did not stand alone, no; there were others had sent him; they meant what they said. Here it was not mid-July, and they sailed in a stout ship. Why were they slipping northward without booty, when good

purchase was to be made upon the sea? They wished the Captain to put the ship about; he was a good fighter, and they would follow him gladly, an he would; if not —

"My man, 'tis mutiny you're talking," Christopher said, with rigid patience. "Go forward now, and give me no more such words."

"And how if I give 'em some words forward?" growled Tench. "You think you have the boys all at your back, eh? Well, how an if I set it in their thick heads that 'twas you, Captain Ferringham, robbed us of the purchase, that 'twas you sneaked below and staved the hogsheads?"

"Well, well!" whistled Christopher. His left hand was in bandages, and the Master Gunner was a stocky fellow, but he caught the mutineer by the throat, swung him round, and, with a well-aimed kick that was a joy to think on afterward, sent him flying down the companion-ladder. "If you sing that strain again, I'll lay you in irons in the lazaretto," he warned, from the head of the steps.

Several of the men ran aft; they could not all be on the Master Gunner's side, for, as he picked himself up, some of them jeered at him. Crozier, too, had come out from the round-house at the sound of the scuffle, and, as soon as the crew were sent to work again, Christopher drew him over to the rail and told him what had happened. The Scotchman looked sober. "You should have done mair or less, sir," he said anxiously, but after all it seemed that Christopher had hit upon a wise course.

For Thorowgood told him with a chuckle that evening: "The Master Gunner is talking wild about ye, sir. He was a-whispering with O'Connor, but O'Connor laughed in his face and said he told such tales of you only after your boots had made free with him."

It was an ugly incident, none the less, and that it troubled Crozier, troubled Christopher. To that, the little wind that blew was light and perverse, so for two days the *Gilliflower* tacked painfully and made slow progress. The two officers

missed Wotton lamentably; neither felt himself able to work the ship alone, and they held exhausting colloquy in private on every point of navigation. Yet, with all the care and unspoken anxiety, they found time for occasional speech of their home-coming. Christopher had chalked fourteen lines upon the inner side of the roundhouse door. "We can't be more than a fortnight on the voyage, at worst," he said, and each morning he crossed out a line. He hardly mentioned Nan's name, nor did Crozier speak of Recompense, but with much detail they planned how they could most quickly reach the Cape from Boston.

The fifth day brought again a dead calm that Christopher bore with such philosophy as he could summon. He stood the forenoon watch, but Crozier was on the quarterdeck with him, when Jordan came thrumming his cap and asking for a word. "Have I got to kick him too?" Christopher muttered, with a lift of the brows for Crozier, and was almost relieved when he found the carpenter was hesitating about nothing more serious than a few lost tools.

"A hammer and a mallet and two files, sir," Jordan grumbled. "'Were in the chest and fast locked yesternight. Now they're gone, and I'm blest if I see where!"

"Will you look to it?" Christopher asked Rinyon; a possible juxtaposition of files and fettered prisoners had occurred to both, and Crozier examined the flints of his pistols before he swung out of sight down the after hatch.

Christopher listened till his friend's step died away between decks, then sauntered to the stern and looked at the compass. The ship was headed duly enough, but the sea was like oil, and the topsails scarcely fluttered. He had paced back to the companion-ladder and stood gazing down upon the white deck, idly watching the men who were busied there, when he heard below a muffled outcry, and right upon that the snapping report of a pistol. The space of a short breath the whole deck seemed frozen to listen, then there shrilled up from below a nightmare

clamor, and the after hatchway volleyed forth a man who yelled: "The lazaretto! Hell's loose!"

Christopher reached the main deck—he had scarcely felt the rounds of the ladder under his feet—and, dashing aside the messenger, plunged down the hatchway. A burning pain darted through his arm as his bandaged left hand gripped the ladder. Then he gained footing under the murky light of the orlop; bewildered white faces surged round him, and he knew Rinyon's was not among them, even before a voice cried through the din, "They're killing Master Crozier!"

He had reached the hatchway to the lazaretto; men fell away before him, and on his right hand he had a sight of Darby Jordan, with his shirt spotted red. The hatchway was closed and battened. Up through it came the dull report of a pistol, and while he wrenched with his one hand at the rod that held the hatch in place, he heard men about him cry that Crozier and Tarling were below, and one, too, shouted not to put back the hatch, the prisoners all were loose!

Then over his shoulder he caught the flick of steel, and an axe came crashing down upon the hatch. Jordan, breathing in great heaves, was swinging a broadaxe beside him, and the wood rent and splintered under the blows. The third stroke left a yawning black pit, through which leaped an uproar of yells and curses and clash of fetters, but no sound of the pistol. "Rinyon!" Christopher shouted aloud, and, shouldering Jordan aside, swung over the edge of the black hole.

He missed the ladder and, feet first, shot down into a welter of struggling men. He could not see in the pitchy darkness, but he heard thick voices, and he felt hands that clutched at him to drag him down. There had been no answer to his call, but where the struggle was thickest he knew he should find Rinyon, and, blind and deaf and mad with the lust to kill, he ploughed into the mass of them. His heavy sea-boots trampled down the men who fell, and his pistol was out in his hand. It snarled once, and upon the report a man screamed. He had

out the second pistol; he forgot he was hurt; his knife was in his left hand, and he stabbed down into the face of one who caught him about the belt.

A flare of light swept through the black lazaretto; the figures of men flashed out upon him, and he saw down under their feet a limp form that he knew. He darted forward; one rose before him — black brows, distorted jaw, he knew Dearthmont Killion but too well. He saw that his arm was upraised, and something glittered in his fist. "There's for you, too, Kestrel!" he heard Crook-Jaw shout.

Christopher fired, with no conscious aim, and the man reeled back. In the place he left vacant Christopher sprang to Crozier's side and swung him up so one lax arm drooped across his shoulder. The ladder had creaked, he remembered now, and Jordan was beside him, with the blade of his broad-axe dripping red. "For God's own sake, come out o' this!" he shouted, and Christopher, stumbling behind him, dragged Crozier to the ladder. There at the foot Tarling lay on his back, with his upturned face black and his eyes starting. He was dead; they need look only to themselves.

"Take Rinyon's shoulders!" Christopher panted to Jordan, and himself, catching his friend about the knees, held his knife ready to guard their retreat up the ladder. He felt each separate round press against his legs, and Rinyon's dead weight dragged like lead upon his left arm. Above him and below him raged the din — running and shouting on the orlop, shrieking and clatter in the dim lazaretto. All the horror of the prison surged and swayed forward to his feet — half-seen faces, blotched with blood, that mowed upon him out of the dark; fierce hands, with the shackles still biting the flesh, that strove to seize on him. Then, savagest of all, Killion came smashing through the mass of them, with his shoulder running blood, and leaped one round up the ladder. "Come down, Kester Ferringham, come down!" he raged, and his hand clenched like iron about Christopher's knee.

Christopher flung himself back against the ladder, heels braced, and with his knife slashed down at the sunburnt hand and the snarling face. The pirate's hold relaxed at the third stroke. He went crashing down upon his scrambling comrades, and with a last effort Christopher dragged himself up over the edge of the orlop.

A second he wavered where he stood; the sound of his own struggling breaths was louder in his ears than the uproar that eddied about him, and the black figures and white faces of his crew went blurring by him. Then he saw clearly again, and he saw that on the planks at his feet Rinyon Crozier lay. His knees bent under him; he was down at Rinyon's side, and, groping, he had raised him in his arms. Something warm and wet slipped across his hand; the blood was trickling from Rinyon's breast, and, as Rinyon saw it in his dream, his shirt was red.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MASTER OF THE "GILLIFLOWER"

IN the first moment Christopher's mind seemed numb. He saw the dim streaks that the smoky lantern cast athwart the meagre daylight of the orlop; he saw the blurred faces of the men who pressed clamoring round him; and below in the lazaretto he heard the prisoners still yelling and stamping. All those sights and sounds meant quite as much to him as did the sight of Rinyon Crozier's bloodless face against his arm.

Then realization came; there would be no return to Marsh-point; Rinyon was dying, and mutiny and insurrection were bellowing round him. He would soon go the same way as his friend, and it were best so, only ere he went he would strike one blow to avenge him. There he raised his eyes, and he saw above him Jack, with a lantern in his hand, and Thorowgood, armed with a brace of pistols, and Jordan, who had swung about to guard the hatch; there were other loyal men besides Crozier to fight for, the thought thrilled through him; he was captain of the ship.

He bent and kissed Rinyon swiftly, for, even should he come through alive, there were hours of work to hold him and this must be farewell. Then he stood up stoutly, and now his blood was jumping with a furious sense of combat. "Carry Master Crozier to the surgeon," he told off two men. "Gently, on your lives! Batten that tarpaulin over the hatchway. Give me those pistols, Boatswain. One is emptied? Charge it again, Jack. Now, Jordan, what was it happened? Be quick!"

Without shifting his eyes or his upraised axe from the threatening hatchway, the old bondman panted out the story: "Francis Tarling was below, giving 'em their rations. Drogheda Will was on guard at the hatchway."

A little shift and movement in the circled crowd made Christopher glance to the left side of the hatchway. A man's stiffly upturned boots caught his eye, and he followed up along the body that lay outstretched; the blackness that smeared the face and the planks about the head was not the blackness of shadow.

"We were in the carpenter's room," Jordan was saying monotonously. "We heard Francis shout for help. Master Crozier, he out and jumped down the hatchway. I was behind him; I had a mallet in hand. Drogheda, he sprang at me. I struck up his arm; his shot went wide. Then I staved in his skull."

Christopher reached back his hand for Drogheda's reloaded pistols, but his eyes were on the faces of the men who ringed him round. They stood quiet now, but the tumult in the lazaretto, half muffled under the tarpaulin, stormed on. He raised his voice so it sounded crisply through the din: "Who was it batted down that hatch?"

A man in the foremost throng shifted his feet, and another drew a long breath. Then Jack Calderwood caught at his cousin's wrist and shrilled: "'Twas Tench. I saw as I came down the forward hatch. Tench did it."

A half audible murmur stirred through the company, and then the Master Gunner, shouldering aside those who stood by him, strode into the little cleared space between the Captain and his men. "Ay, I batted the hatch," he cried, and, folding his arms, fronted his commander, but he shifted his eyes swiftly to glance at his comrades. "What have you to say thereto, Captain Ferringham?"

Christopher saw the man, and beyond and around him he saw the faces of his fellows; some were blank and some were

frightened, and one or two were alight with interest, as if this were a stage-play. But there was on few of them the understanding he had expected to see, and the unconscious relief in his expression found its reflection in the Master Gunner's manner. "If I did, sir," his tone fell sullen, "'twas for the best, I held, you'll believe, sir. The prisoners were all loose. In Heaven's name, look to 'em now, sir! Then work your will on me. They were loose, and we were not armed against 'em. 'Twere better that two men die than all."

Christopher heard him thus far, while his nervous lower lip went out and licked his unkempt mustache. "You hold it good doctrine, Tench," he asked, "that one man suffer for the people? I hold it good doctrine too." He swung up his pistol.

The Master Gunner read the look in those blue-gray eyes even better than he read the gesture. He gave a cry: "Stand by me, lads!" and, whipping out his knife, sprang forward.

"God 'a' mercy!" quoth Christopher, and fired; the muzzle of the pistol almost touched the man's forehead. The Master Gunner's knife fell clanging to the deck, and the Master Gunner himself, tottering an instant where he stood, spun half round and fell face downward at the Captain's feet.

Christopher cocked the second pistol, ready for the onrush of his crew that must follow. They swayed forward indeed—he took swift note of the men that thrust into the van—swayed up, even to the body of the Master Gunner, but Jordan with his broadaxe had faced about and Thorowgood had out his knife. With half-stifled curses, with a rearward murmur, too, like approbation, the crowd swayed back again. The report of the pistol had been heard in the lazaretto too, and the uproar there had given place to an expectant hush. Christopher's low-pitched voice sounded loud: "Take the deck, Thorowgood. Give Jack four brace o' pistols from the round-house and let him bring them hither. A word besides." He whispered an order to the Boatswain, and then, speaking in

Dutch to the man he had taken from the pirates, sent him away with Thorowgood and Jack.

With eyes on his half-subdued crew, Christopher yet sensed when his messengers gained the deck, and his thoughts darted with them. Rinyon was there; perhaps he would be conscious a moment ere the end. He clenched his hand about the butt of his pistol; if Jack would only hasten! But the merciless seconds ran out,—he counted each one; the thin streak of blood by the Master Gunner's head widened to a little pool, and in the lazaretto the noise, albe half-hearted, had begun again, ere the boy came down the ladder with his armful of pistols. "All's well with Jan, sir," he reported gayly.

Christopher replaced his pistols in his belt. "Drop your axe, Darby," he bade. "And do you all hark to me. Those two lie dead here never plotted alone to deliver this ship to the pirates. You know't, and I know't. How many of you stood with them, I care not. Henceforth you will do my orders, and we will bring this ship into Boston harbor. An you grow cock-a-hoop,"—he smiled with a tense drawing of the corners of his lips—"I have placed Dutch Jan below in the magazine with a lantern and a watch I took from Stewkley's locker. An I come not every four hours to hear his report,—if I should be stabbed in the back, say,—he will clap the lighted candle into one of the powder barrels. And we'll all go amiably together a deal farther than Boston."

They looked at him, and there were now some whiter faces than at Manus Tench's fall. "We're all thrue to ye, Captain," blarneyed O'Connor, and another whined that there was no need; what if the Dutch blockhead grew muddled and fired the powder without cause?

Christopher cut their murmurings short with crisp orders: the larboard watch on deck, the starboard watch stay by him; let these take pistols and stand by the hatchway; the prisoners were still to deal with.

When the tarpaulin was cast back and a lantern swung

down into the lazaretto, they found the men below were very quiet; not one of those so hot to follow Christopher up the ladder a half-hour before made a movement to clamber thither now, till Jordan and O'Connor and two other volunteers went down into the lazaretto and, clubbing and hauling, forced them up. Dearmont Killion, with bleeding cheek and cut hand, was the first to gain the orlop, and, as he set foot on the deck, his eyes fell on the body of the Master Gunner. Under the grime and the blood his face went whitey-gray. "Hell burn you, Kestrel!" he gnashed out, and dropped down with a sob alongside the hatchway. There they searched him, while he with his broken shoulder winced and writhed under their touch. But inside his soiled red coat they found poor Tarling's knife, and Christopher, remembering the weapon uplifted in Dearmont's hand, and remembering those cuts that dabbled Rinyon's breast with red, had no paltering of mercy.

Man by man they haled the rest of the prisoners forth, stripped them, and searched them. There were nineteen living, and there were four who would never trouble the hangman; Crozier's pistols had done good work, and Tarling, ere they strangled him, had left the mark of his knife in one man's heart. Christopher sickened at the horrible odds of that blind fight; more than a half-score of the prisoners had filed their fetters and been free to fall upon the two men. He promised himself to requite it to those on whom the files were found, but Jordan discovered them, after close search, flung away in the bottom of the lazaretto; of the hammer and the mallet, taken, it would seem, to mislead suspicion, there was no trace.

The search was ended at last; the prisoners, fast bound again, had been thrust down into the lazaretto, and a strong guard had been placed at the hatchway. But Dearmont Killion still lay unbound where he had fallen, and his sullen eyes, that had roved in vain over the silent faces of the crew, sought Christopher. "Pest gnaw you!" he groaned. "What mean ye to do with me?"

"Carry him up on the quarterdeck." Christopher did not deign to answer him. "Bring the fetters; staples and a mallet too, Jordan." He started toward the after hatchway as he spoke, and, at the first movement from the spot which he had kept that last hour, reeled and flung out his arm. Surely, he was hurt; his boot was full of blood, and the side of his coat was wet; but when Jack, crying aloud, sprang to aid him, he pushed him aside. Around him stood his crew, with faces on the sudden hazy to his sight; they stood and eyed him as carrion crows eye a foundering horse.

He drew his hand across his dizzy forehead, and slowly but erectly strode to the ladder. He was the master of the ship and he would not fall down before them, not till the work was done and he came to the place where Rinyon lay. He went up the ladder, round by round; the rectangle of blue above spread broader till the clear air pulsed upon his face and he stood upon the deck. The sun was level with his eyes; when he went down between decks it had stood above his head.

Step by step still, he groped up the companion-ladder, and, clinging to the port rail, looked on, while the men did his bidding and shackled Killion down to the staples at the lee side of the quarterdeck. "You had the knife." Christopher's voice sounded to his ears as from a distance. "You killed him. You'll lie here till we reach port."

Killion hauled himself up on his sound elbow. "Ay, I killed Trescott's Rinyon!" he shouted. "Damn him and you too! Do what you will. 'Twon't bring him back. A' is burning in hell!"

The words still rang in Christopher's ears while he gave his last orders and sent the men forward, while he crept to the stern and looked that the ship was holding her course. "'Twon't bring him back!" He had reached the door of the roundhouse at last; his work was done, and he was free to enter, but an instant he stood with his unseeing face against the panels and his nerveless hand upon the latch.

Then the latch had clicked under his fingers, and he had reeled within and stood leaning upon the table. A ray of sunlight speckled it, and when he followed the ray toward the window, he blinked upon the surgeon, who stood looking at him. "You're wounded, sir," he heard him say from afar, and then he had pushed by the man and staggered to the left-hand bunk.

Rinyon lay there on his back, with limp arms at his sides, but his chest heaved never so slightly. "He's alive!" Christopher rasped out, and there his weak knees faltered and he dropped down beside the bunk.

The surgeon, bending over him, was speaking rapidly: "There are three ribs broke, and he was twice stabbed and nigh choked thereto. He is a strong man, but he is too grievously hurt —"

"Hold your tongue!" swore Christopher. "What d'ye know, you cullion? He's going to live, sink your soul! he'll live to see you dance a turn upon nothing at all."

Much more he said in the same strain, while the surgeon, gravely assenting, looked to his hurts. He had been stabbed in the thigh and in the side with something sharp, most probably a file, Christopher was made to know; they were slight flesh wounds, but he had been wasting blood gayly for half the afternoon. The surgeon dressed the hurts with shreds of the last shirt in the roundhouse, for with the ruck of wounded men aboard, linen was precious; and then the careful Jack crept in, with a hoarded panikin of rum and a bottle of wine for his Captain's refreshment. Christopher wanted none of the headier liquor; since he fought with Wasket in the mingled rum and bilge water, the smell of the stuff turned him sick; but he drank off a cup of the wine, while he sat on the floor by Rinyon's bunk. The surgeon gave him admirable counsel, too, about taking a good night's sleep and being quite his own man again by morning. "Sleep?" chuckled Christopher, and what with the wine and the loss of blood and the

memory of Tench and the sight of Rinyon who was going to live, laughed till he choked. "If I sleep, who in the devil's name sails the ship? The cook? You lend me a hand up, and I'll go take my sleep on the quarterdeck."

The night was moonless, with a wash of stars amid the shoals of cloud, and the sails loomed large against the sky. For three days now every foot of the *Gilliflower's* canvas had been spread to catch the least ripple of wind, but the great white folds drooped lifeless. Half the night through Christopher watched the mastheads sway, and wondered if that motion sprang from the dizziness of his brain; he heard the watches, in their turn, stamp upon the deck; he saw the stars go creeping down the sky; and that was all his rest. Heavy-headed and weak-kneed, he clung to the rail near the steersman's lamp that at last burned dim, and it was then that first he felt the upspringing breeze. Just a fluttering in the air it came, and died away upon the water, and then again, after long space, it pulsed so strongly that it stirred the hair on his forehead. There was a faint singing in the taut cordage, and the sails filled sweetly; a soft south wind was blowing, and the ship had scented home.

Christopher hobbled to the break of the poop and shouted his orders; every man must be yare, but so long as possible he would take in no inch of the great sails. The dawn came out upon the water; opaline gray, ripe red, tawny orange—he watched the colors flush in sea and sky. Still the wind blew, and the morning watch, obedient to his word, were washing down the deck with spatter of chill water. Just as at that moment yesterday afternoon when he saw his crew do his pleasure, Christopher felt now the bracing joy of a fight half won. Wounded and single-handed, he yet would bring his ship into port and he would bring Rinyon home alive.

Stepping stiffly with his hurt leg, he limped into the round-house. A fresh smell of the dawn came in at the window, and Rinyon—or else he dreamed—had since last night shifted

his bloodless head a little on the bolster. Christopher bent over him, with a vague hope that he might stir and gaze on him; the man still breathed—he would not mark how faintly. "That surgeon is a loggerhead," he blustered. "Don't you be saucy to contradict me, Jack."

But little Calderwood had no thought of doing aught to cross his hero; of course Rinyon would live, if Christopher wished it, and by such complaisance he won the Captain to drink and eat his hasty breakfast. There was the strength of fourteen men in him that morning, Christopher fairly laughed, and he struck off another of the lines upon the door that stood for days ere he took the deck again.

The sun swung upward to the noon-mark, and slipped down the sky again, and darkness closed upon the ship. The second time Christopher kept the deck the night through, save that thrice he stepped into the dim roundhouse and bent his head to assure himself that Rinyon breathed, and twice he stumbled below to hear the "All's well!" from his sentinel in the magazine. He had put Jordan now at that post; a steady head was needed, and the bondman had it, yet at times there came over Christopher a hideous fear lest some instant's lapse on his follower's part should rend the deck beneath his feet. But the shift was serving to hold his men in check; he feared them little, since the strongest of his crew was dead and the most dangerous of his prisoners lay chained beneath his eyes, yet he watched them ceaselessly.

If it had been but to fight them! As in the days at Three Winds he raged at the waiting part he must play, but he had learned to play it and he held to it now. All eyes and ears for his crew's least movements he was in those hours; not till the waxing of the second day did he let his tense mind and body slacken in physical suffering, and then it was a heavy sleepiness that pressed upon him. It was more than eight and forty hours now since he had closed his eyes. His eyelids sagged as under a leaden pressure, and a dull ache throbbed at the base

of his skull. When he stumbled into the roundhouse, he gazed wistfully upon his disordered bunk and he wanted but little of casting himself down among the blankets. But the master must not quit the deck while that breeze was humming astern; he drank a draught of wine and went forth again to take an observation, with hands that were a little unsteady.

Only one snatch of rest did he have that day, with his head and shoulders on the roundhouse table, and he woke from it, startled by Jack's grip on his shoulder, to hear a monotonous voice speak near him. It was Rinyon who spoke, but when Christopher limped to the bunk, the man looked on him with wide eyes and gave no sign. Yet he spoke always, and his words were of foolish old happenings back in Meadowcreek or of places and people of whom Christopher had never heard. The Captain drew back against the wall, with his sound hand to his bandaged head; a dazed memory came to him of how Ned Burrell had looked and spoken the night that he died.

The past hours a subconscious refrain had kept singing itself through Christopher's head: "Nineteen prisoners, five and twenty men behind me, and I know not which are true, and five days from home." But this night of slashing wind and driving cloud he paced the deck to a new strain: "Blandford dead, and Ned Burrell dead in my arms, and Wotton that followed me shot down at my side. Save me the life of this last that held to me. God, if I be not accursed, save me the life of this man!"

The sun came up, and another sun, and still Rinyon tossed in his bunk and raved, and still Christopher snatched his catnaps and kept the deck to the tune of his monotonous prayer. Dearmont Killion, white-lipped and burning-eyed, pulled himself up on his elbow and shouted at him his old taunt: "Struck clean, eh, Kester? You're a great captain, but you can't make him live!" The words and the man alike meant little now to Christopher; he looked to it that Dearmont's fetters were fast and he sent the surgeon to dress his wounds each day; he was

missing no detail of a captain's duty. He made the rounds of his ship himself, even down to see that all was secure in the lazaretto; he looked to the supplies — they were on half allowance of water now; and he laid the course and took the reckonings and kept the log and ordered the sails. What lay beyond the return — Jack's mother, and Marshpoint, and Nan, even Nan, — had drifted into the hazy after-part of his brain, but he was working home the ship because it was to do, and Rinyon was dying.

He was now beyond even the desire to sleep; he wondered that he could have believed that rest were possible. The skin seemed stretched upon his skull, and he felt as if his eyes were looking out from the depth of pits upon a blood-shotten world. That fifth night since the struggle in the lazaretto, as he crawled up the companion-ladder, he saw something dark that lay to the weather side of the quarterdeck. He groped thither, wondering, and he saw a man whose back, by the helpless trailing of his legs, had been broken. He lifted his face, under the dim starlight, and it was the clay-white face of Andrew Wotton.

Next instant Christopher had nerved himself, and, sweating and gasping, was stamping his foot down upon the spot, while the helmsman gazed upon him with dropping jaw. The figure came again; he saw it by the door of the roundhouse when he crept thither to hark to Crozier's weak mutterings; he saw it lying near the helm, but this time when he looked it was Manus Tench, face downward, with a thread of blood trickling from beneath his head.

His men stared on him with low whisperings, in the gray light of the morning. When they washed down the decks, he went, according to custom, into the scuppers, where he bade O'Connor drench a bucket of salt water over his head; such treatment, often repeated, never failed to hearten him for the moment. "Sure, ye don't look yourself, sir," the Irishman flung discipline to the winds. "We're all thrue to ye, every

man. Won't ye be afther bringing the carpenter up from the powdher barrels? He wouldn't be minding us, if ye should fall into a fever or the like."

"I'm not going to fall into a fever." Christopher set his jaws. But he realized dully that things were at a desperate pass with him, and that noon, when he wrote up the log in a hand that more than ever sprawled and blotted, he scrawled a word or two of explanation to Calderwood on a bit of paper, and, wrapping it round that old undelivered letter, gave both to Jack. "For your father, when you come home," he bade.

He dropped his head down on his arms a breathing space, not to sleep, only to ease his eyes of their burning sense of being torn wide. His ears, though, were still alert for any suspicious sound from the deck, and he realized at length that Rinyon's voice, to whose weak ramblings he had become wonted, was silent. A long space he bowed over the table, and wondered that in him was no further power to feel even the dull-est ache. He dragged himself to his feet at last and crept toward the bunk. Rinyon lay quiet, with his face to the wall; Christopher leaned over him, and, focussing his outworn eyes, perceived only after long time the faintest fluttering in the man's eyelids.

The last stupor, then! He was too heavy-headed to think keenly of aught but the routine of the ship, and, like some cog in an inexorable machine, he left his friend and went now to his work. There was no navigator but he aboard the *Gilliflower*, and even if Thorowgood, in a lighter wind, could have been trusted to stand a watch out, Christopher durst not give to another the charge of his uncertain crew. So he went out upon the quarterdeck, and, as the night thickened, he saw his dead men, and the black hours through, when he had leisure from his affairs, he spoke with them civilly. They were real, much more real than the men about him, for they had a way of looming up, then dwindling small before his eyes, or going blurry round the edges.

Jack came up to him about the dawning,—a blurred shape, like all the other shapes, and his voice at first conveyed no meaning. "Come into the roundhouse, Christopher, come. Rinyon, he hath stirred. Come!"

Blotches of dew blistered the deck; Christopher took note of them as he stepped along, carefully, for his sea-boots had grown unruly of late. He crossed the threshold gingerly, and gazed about the roundhouse. The narrow windows were open; the moist morning air filled the straitened space, and a pearl-white light fell on the well-known objects. Rinyon lay with his face toward the room now—unshaven, grimy, pale, an unlovely sight to look on; but Christopher staggered to him, and, bracing his hand against the wall above the narrow bunk, bent over him. He heard the patter of men's feet, the swirl of water as they washed the decks, but he did not take his eyes from Rinyon's face till, as if his steady will compelled them, the sick man's eyelids quivered.

It was a sane gaze met Christopher's, and a sane voice, albe a weak one, that whispered, "Eh, Christie, man!"

"All's well, lad!" Christopher tempered his shaking voice. "We're a'most home now. Don't ye fret with talking. Lie still!"

He himself was wavering shamefully as he stood, and he was saved from a childish outbreak only by the presence of the surgeon, who came then to look to his patient. Christopher fetched the man a feeble clap on the shoulder. "He's mending," he whispered. "He'll live. Don't you gainsay me again, sirrah!"

The man would live, yes, the surgeon admitted, but Christopher, without waiting for his assurance, was bending over his charts. He knew his weakness well enough to profit by every chance upflickering of strength. The black lines all were double at first, but he got them clear and reckoned the course. If the breeze still held—he caught his breath; to-morrow he and Rinyon might be in port.

Christopher rattled his men about their work that day with hearty good will, yet that passing strength did not save him when the black night came down. With a child's terror he saw the sun sink and looked for the dead men, and, seeing them, though he expected them, almost whimpered aloud. He crawled toward the stern, he talked regardlessly with the helmsman, with the lookout. Even Killion's taunts were welcome in the haunted silence, but Killion was sullen quiet that night. He called forth Jack at last, and, leaning on the boy's shoulder, paced the deck. Yet the dead were there about him — Wotton and Tarling and Tench and the men who fell in the sea-fight. "Don't you see, Jack?" he urged, but the boy shrank from him.

But the endless night had at last an end, and the sun shone out, and it shone on low sand hills upon the larboard quarter. "Land, ho!" the lookout shouted, and the watch cheered. The Captain did not cheer, but the unshed tears burned like fire in his wearied eyes. "Few hours more. We're going home!" the refrain now beat in his head. In the roundhouse Rinyon slept easily, and to right and left the fair Bay of Massachusetts opened out about the *Gilliflower*.

Ere noon they had sighted a fisher-boat from Hingham, and her captain, dubious at first, when he came over the rail and spied the white-faced pirate chained upon the quarterdeck, had agreed to pilot them to Boston. The scent of pines and of warm inland glades now was in the air, and to starboard rose the high land of Cape Anne and to larboard the rocks of Cohasset. Green islands sprang up from the blue — the first green spots the *Gilliflower's* men had seen in weeks. "We'll be a' land to-night, boys!" whooped young Jack, and did some ungodly dance steps in the waist.

But Christopher stood by the starboard rail, with his dim eyes fastened on the hills to westward, the three hills of Boston that darkened against the sky where the sun was setting. So he stood, when behind him he heard a dreadful

cry, like the cry of an animal trapped and torn, and it called his name. He faced to larboard, and he saw that they were skirting a rocky island, bald and black, and upon it, silhouetted clear against the eastern sky, rose a gibbet. From the gibbet, in chains that creaked with the stirring of the wind, dangled the shreds of a human being; the eyeless skull looked into his eyes. It was the island where mutineers and pirates were hanged, and it was Dearmont Killion who cried aloud.

"Kester, Kester! For the love o' God!" his voice quavered; and Christopher, after an instant's cold hesitation, crossed the deck to him, slowly, for each crack had broadened to a wide chasm that threatened to engulf him. Dearmont had strained himself up as far as the chains would suffer him, and he made a movement now as if he would have caught at Christopher's knees, but the young man drew back a step. "Don't ye forsake me, Kester!" Killion wailed. "We've drunk o' the same can. I've paid my scot under the sun and the cold these seven nights. Damn my soul! I can't hang. Help me, Kester; you were always a good fellow. 'Twas Enoch Gleason brought Ziba and me to testify against ye; 'twas along of him—"

"You have requited it to him. Let him be!" Christopher's voice was passionless as that of a corpse.

"Not that! If you'll help me— You can hide me. Let my mates think you slew me. There'll be a score still to die—enough for the gallows. There's gold, Kester, jolly gold. Was Stewkley buried it; I know the spot; you cannot find it without me—"

"It was with the gold you bribed Tench!" Christopher put the ideas together painfully.

"Not him only!" the other urged. "Half your men. God! we wanted so little of getting back the ship! Half your men, your fine O'Connor there at the helm, I can name 'em—"

"I do not want to hear," Christopher's voice came wearily. "You've sold one side to the other for the last time, Dearmont."

He spoke without anger, but there was that in his dead tone cowed the man before him more than any bluster. Killion looked up into his set, haggard face, then, with a mingled torrent of sobs and curses, dropped down on the deck again. Christopher eyed him curiously a moment, then his gaze wandered to the hills upon the starboard quarter, and without another look at the man he went back across the deck. The sun was setting now behind the hills, and the sky was red like blood.

The red had almost faded from the sky, and the earliest stars were swimming in the glow, when at last, just as Christopher had sensed it in his dreams, the *Gilliflower* lay to under the guns of the Castle beneath the steepes of Boston town. The windlass clattered and the anchor splashed, the cordage creaked — all the noises he had dreamed on Christopher heard, but his head was between his arms, where he sagged against the rail, and he did not look up till he heard the clatter of oars alongside.

He crept to the break of the poop just as a man in a steel corselet came up the gangway-ladder to the deck. Under the light of the lantern, hung by the mainmast, he knew him for Davenport, the Captain of the Castle, and he doffed his hat, though he dared not venture on the courtesy of descending the companion-ladder. "Captain, this is the ship *Gilliflower* of Meadowcreek, twenty-two months from port, taken by Was Stewkley and his men, and retaken by me, Christopher Ferringham." By the look on Davenport's face he judged that the Captain had heard of him ere this, but he thought little of it, for he saw other men, with muskets, were following Davenport up the gangway; his work was done, and he found his knees were shaking and the deck was dazzling before his eyes. "It is in your hands," his voice trailed away. "There are pirates. And I want that boy to be set ashore and have a horse. My mate is wounded in the roundhouse. Look to all. I — I'm going to sleep."

He turned and crawled away from the sight of them all into the farthest dark of the stern. Over the dusky water he saw a distant twinkle of lights. "'Tis Boston town," he muttered, and dropped upon his quarterdeck.

Just an instant he knew the comfort of lying flat once more, of closing his eyes in the night-time; then he knew nothing, heard nothing, till red light beat upon his smarting eyelids and about him voices murmured. He opened his eyes heavily upon the men who bent over him, and it was to him no wonder that the one who was holding him up with an arm about his shoulders was the Meadowcreek Constable. There was something he had to say to him, but he could not recall it now. They wanted him to stand up, so he stood up docilely, with the sky and the deck reeling about him; and then he knew, without resentment, that they were fair carrying him down to a boat. There was lantern light, and curious, white faces of men, and then, as they bore him down the gangway-ladder, faint stars that darted athwart the black sky, so he was glad to close his eyes. Through the darkness he heard the voice of his Irish blackguard O'Connor, "Three cheers now, bhoys, and with a will, for Captain Ferringham!"

He heard the cheers — they rent his head with their clamor so he almost groaned aloud — and then there was but the creak of oars on thole-pins, and then peace.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WHEN THE SUN AND MOON DANCE ON THE GREEN"

It was not a time to which Christopher looked back with pride, those first days of his return to Massachusetts. Long afterward he tingled with humiliation to recall how, when he had a blink of consciousness and found himself laid in bed in an unfamiliar room, he had whimpered to those about him not to take away the candle, not to leave him alone in the dark. But the dumb terror and the memory of the dead slipped from him. He slept—blank, black hours he slept—and in the hazy moments of his waking he realized only the blessed comfort that it was to have off his clothes and lie between sheets again. Indistinct faces were about him at times—troublesome folk who made him drink before they suffered him lie back again. Once he dreamed of hearing Calderwood's voice, and Gleason's face came and went before him more frequently than any.

The debauch of sleep ended at last; he found himself awake, clear-headed, and it was night-time. At the head of his bed a candle burned, and for a space he was content to watch the shadows that it cast upon the dark walls; then he stretched himself slowly, and, turning on his side, dozed and woke and dozed again. In the outer dark a cock crowed, and then the daylight brightened about him, and he saw that at the window white curtains stirred. It was a good two years since he had lain in a room with curtains, and they recalled to him pleasant things of old—the scent of clean herbs and the rustle of a woman's skirts.

He still eyed the curtains with satisfaction when a door creaked—the least sound now made him start tensely—and the Constable Gleason came to his bedside. The same man, with the old soldierly bearing, but there was a sprinkling of gray about his temples and in his thick beard that Christopher had never noted. "You're a brave fellow to sleep, Kester," he smiled down at him, and there was a sameness in the gruff voice and the look of the eyes that brought back to Christopher the old days and what it was he had had to say.

"You must understand, sir," he got out the words, "I never broke my parole I gave you. They tried to put me in irons. I told you if you put the bolts on me —"

"Yes, yes, no matter for that," Gleason cut him short.

He was very good to him, Christopher realized; he could not have been kinder if he had been his own father. He fetched him in breakfast now, and Christopher sat up and ate as heartily as he had slept. "It's rare to taste something other than powdered beef," he apologized, and, the food despatched, began to ask eager questions about the days he had lost.

It was the parlor of Captain Davenport's house on Castle Island in which he lay, he found, and Rinyon Crozier, mending of his hurts, was in the room above him. Three days had passed since the *Gilliflower* came into harbor; the pirates were committed for trial a fortnight thence, when Christopher would be in case to testify, and the crew were for the most part held as witnesses, though Field and Jordan and Thorowgood had been suffered, on Gleason's surety, to drift away to Meadowcreek. The Constable himself had been at the Castle ever since the first evening when he had met Jack Calderwood, as he landed on the Boston shore, and, learning that the *Gilliflower* with Christopher in command had anchored in the harbor, had come out to the ship as fast as two pair of oars could bring him. Calderwood had been there the second day, but

he had gone away upon a journey; and Mistress Calderwood would have come, were it not necessary that she be with her daughter Lucy. "'Tis a fine little girl, Calderwood tells me," Gleason ended.

"Lucy always was that," Christopher assented, then sat up, half erect. "You mean, Lucy hath just borne a daughter? Truth! she's been married nigh two years." He lay down again, with his face half-hidden in the bolster. "I've been long away," he muttered.

He was rather quiet then, till Captain Davenport, a large, breezy presence, came in at dinner-time and had some talk with him. Davenport, in the main, asked questions about the fight and the homeward voyage — respectful questions — and he called the sick man Captain Ferringham. The Kestrel, used to the scantest regard from the Massachusetts men, looked surprised. "I never thought him so civil," he told the Constable when his host had gone.

By the next day, what with sleep and proper food, something of the old expression had come back to Christopher's unshaven lips and haggard eyes, so it was no surprise to those about him when he demanded his clothes. Between blood stains and salt water, he found, to his disappointment, the nondescript garments in which he quitted the *Gilliflower* had been fit only for the fire; but Gleason promised to fetch him other clothes before next day. "And good shirts, if it please you, sir," Christopher urged. "I've had nothing finer than kenting to my back for months. I'd like holland shirts, but I can wear dowlas. I'll quit you for it when I touch my share of the prize money. Sure, I'm bare now as I was the day I went from Meadowcreek."

The half-smiling allusion made Gleason's eyes darken. "I've something to say to you, Kester," he spoke, after an instant's hesitation. "Since the ship came in, I've seen my man Ger-shom. He told me a deal of you, and of one thing that befell on shipboard. And then I spoke with Calderwood. That

letter that you found, it would have made all right between you and your uncle?"

"I think it would, sir," Christopher answered, with eyes averted, and he heard the heavy breath the Constable drew.

"Yet, on my word, I do not believe Enoch meant to keep back that letter," Gleason spoke presently, more to himself than to his hearer. "But when he once had let the chance slip, and it may have been just the lapse of a minute, why, then he could not give it. He never was so base to keep it wilfully."

He rose to his feet, and, pacing to the seaward window, stood looking forth so long that Christopher bethought himself and shifted the talk. "Can you see the ship from that window? Will you not put by the curtain, sir?" He doubled the bolster beneath his shoulder, and, raising himself thus, had a sight through the narrow casement of the blue water where rode the *Gilliflower*, with her sails close furled. He eyed her lovingly—high quarterdeck, tall masts—the little world where he had suffered and had ruled. "A brave little ship!" he breathed.

Gleason let the curtain fall. "It was thus I looked for Enoch to come home," he said abruptly. "This was to blot out what went before—what you know of. But it's you that have come back in a way would make a father proud."

Christopher looked down at the glints of sun that lay on the floor; there was but one thing he could say, and pity for the man beside him made his voice almost harsh as he blurted it out: "Look you, sir, if you can make Gershom hold his tongue—and if you can't, tell him from me I'll break his head if he prattles—there's no need this matter about the letter be sung through Meadowcreek. No, I don't forgive Enoch,"—his eyes flashed into Gleason's—"but I'd liefer the story were not told."

The Constable's face lighted slowly. "It should not be hid for his sake nor for mine," he said at last. "But my wife

— I know she used ye curstly enough — but Enoch was her only child, and he died cruelly. She hath ailed ever since the tidings came. I'd keep her ignorant of this. I thank you for't, Kester."

Rather abruptly then they flinched away from the subject, and Christopher talked at length of the ingenios on the sugar plantations till Gleason took his leave in quest of the promised clothes. He brought them to the Castle next morning; there were breeches and doublet of gray frieze, scarcely worn, that fitted Christopher fairly, and the holland shirt and the boots and the lop-brimmed felt hat of the kind he had always affected pleased him as well as if they had been made for him. He dressed and shaved; quite his own man again, he declared, but the Constable noted that the fine sea-tan was bleached from his face, and he jumped whenever a door slammed.

Christopher himself realized he was still weak, when he clambered up the stairs to Crozier's chamber; his head was unbandaged and his other wounds were nearly healed, but he half-unconsciously favored the leg that had been hurt, and he took a long time in mounting the stairs. But when he came into the chamber he forgot his lameness, for Rinyon had heard his step and turned his face toward the door. Christopher reached the bed in a brace of his old long strides, and, catching his friend's hand, remembered only just in time not to grip too hard. There was the old look in Rinyon's eyes, and he was trying to say he was blithe to see Christopher; and Christopher, remembering the vacant stare that had chilled his heart aboard the *Gilliflower*, and the senseless words those lips had babbled, choked and laughed and pressed Rinyon's hand the tighter. "Sink your soul!" he said gruffly. "Next time you have no better work than to dream pestilence lying dreams, don't come rounding them to me."

"Aweel," Rinyon urged piteously, "I didna say I dreamed I was deid; I saw mysel lie in a bloody sark, and faith! it came to pass."

The man was still weak and sick enough to resent being jested about, so Christopher set himself to soothing him, and henceforth picked his phrases more carefully. He was much with Rinyon in the next two days, for Gleason, now that Christopher stood on his feet again, had concerns which drew him away to Meadowcreek. "Your uncle will come hither soon to look to you," he told Christopher at their parting, and Christopher nodded rather coldly; at heart—though, after all, he looked for little better—he was hurt that Calderwood so neglected him.

He was strong enough now to take his place at Davenport's table, to saunter round the house-yard and to the limits of the island, even at last to cross the harbor to Boston and seek a boat for the journey to Marshpoint, had not Davenport thwarted the purpose. "He hath some whimsey of my staying in the Massachusetts jurisdiction till Killion and the rest are brought to trial," Christopher told Crozier wrathfully. "We'll look to that, eh? I'll go to the Cape next week, 'less he hath orders to lay me in irons. A year and ten months of waiting, and now not twenty leagues from her! My word, do they think me made of ice?"

So he chafed out the week until Friday, the eighth day since the *Gilliflower* came in. The morning was breathless and warm, with scarce a ripple of hot wind, and the vivid sea gave back the unmarred blue of the sky. The sight of the water that lapped away to the Cape Cod shore maddened Christopher, so he swung his chair about back to the window, and he tried to read aloud to Rinyon. It was a book which Captain Davenport had lent him, *Civil and Ecclesiastical Rites of the Hebrews*. "A strong brewing for a man upon his back," Christopher told his friend, "yet I'll venture one dose."

But he had not read so much as a page when there came a pattering of feet on the landing without, and a little maid of Davenport's household, all aflutter with her tidings, pushed open the door: "Captain Ferringham, I was bid tell you—

'tis a gentleman hath just landed at the wharf, 'tis Master Calderwood from Meadowcreek would speak with you."

Christopher closed his book with a deliberateness that amazed him; more, he dallied yet a time to see that Rinyon was quite comfortable ere he left him. The sick man eyed him closely and moistened his lips once as if he thought to speak. With the same cool bearing Christopher went down the stairs, but his knees must still have been weak, for he gripped the rail fast, and once within the empty parlor stood leaning heavily upon the back of a chair. Voices murmured in the kitchen, but he made no movement to go forth. He remembered that last day at Meadowcreek; he remembered the time in the smithy when he shod his uncle's horse. Then he heard outside the door a step he had never forgotten, and the breath came short in his throat. Of a sudden he recalled how he had listened once for that step, how he had prayed for his uncle's coming,—and it was not Calderwood's fault. With some faint reflection of the desperate mood in which he had sprung up to greet his deliverer, there in the chamber over the Constable's kitchen, he took a step toward the door.

The door had opened and shut, and Calderwood had entered the room. Their eyes met, held each other, and then the elder man had stepped to Christopher's side and offered his hand. They shook hands formally, and Christopher heard his uncle saying, in his old precise voice: "I am glad to see you better, cousin. You scarce recognized us when I was last at the Castle."

"Won't you be seated, sir?" Christopher bade, in a civil tone, but dry, and drew back a little; yet this was, after all, as much as he had expected from Calderwood.

The other shook his head. "If we would reach Meadowcreek ere sunset there is little time to spare."

"We?" Christopher's face flushed hot. "You are asking me there, sir? Some day, perhaps; not now, not till Nan is with me." Then for once in his life he lost his physical awe

of Calderwood, and gripped his arm as if he were a friend. "She's there? Is that what you mean, uncle? She's waiting for me at Meadowcreek? You mean it?"

The look in Calderwood's face told him he guessed aright before Calderwood answered: "Assuredly, when my son told me where to seek her I went to find the girl. I brought her unto Meadowcreek yesternight, Nan and another young maiden who sought your friend, that Scotchman Crozier. Nan is at Lastbrook, and, if I be your surety, there's no reason why you should not go thither too. I did not hope to work the shallop back this same day, but perchance it may be done."

Christopher scarcely heard the last. He was biting at the end of his mustache, and his lips quivered, though it could be no more than the desire to laugh. He put his hand on Calderwood's shoulder. "It's a clean score between us now," he said, with a joyful catch in his voice. "I'm your nephew, your humble servant, what you please. I'll speak one word to Rinyon, and be at the wharf ere you come thither."

Two steps at a time he swung up the stairs which he had come down so deliberately, and, flinging headlong into the parlor chamber, found Crozier propped upon his elbow. "All's well!" he bubbled over with his news. "I'm going to Meadowcreek; Mistress Calderwood is there. And, Rinyon, when you can move, I'll have you thither too."

"Cannily, cannily!" the other counselled in his old tone. "I'm blithe for ye, laddie, but dinna ye fash yoursel for me. Meadowcreek is no biding-place for me that was never aught but a bondman there."

Even in the full career of his joy Christopher saw a gulf of dismay open before him; he was still clear-headed enough to understand the force of Rinyon's words. It would be possible for him, perhaps, who had been once a gentleman in the eyes of the village, who at all times had been Calderwood's nephew, to bring Meadowcreek to accept him as an in-dweller; but for Crozier, Scotchman, bond-servant, fugitive, and for Recom-

pense, a Quaker outcast, there could be only tolerant contempt. He had gained his wife, and he must lose his friend; he saw it so clearly that an instant, for all his new-won happiness, his face fell. "I'll miss you sore, Rinyon," he pleaded. "'Tis like my right arm lopped away quick."

"It went nigh to being lopped away a fortnight ago," Crozier rejoined grimly. "I'd be drifting between the round shot, Christie, were't not for you. Good hap to ye, lad, and rin away to your jo."

Christopher remembered then that Calderwood had made mention of a young girl's seeking Crozier, and he felt easier about his friend. "Good hap to you, too, and very soon!" he laughed. "Fare you well for now, Rinyon. But before the year's out I'll have you mate on a ship with me, spite of your teeth!"

Whistling to himself, he went down the stairs and out into the dazzling noon. The very heat of the air was caressing to his face, and yonder by the little wharf the sail of the shallop gleamed like a wedge of silver. He had left the greensward for the glittering white beach, and now he became aware of a woman's figure that sat upon a brown rock at his right where the beach grass met the sand. He looked again, less carelessly, and then he cried her name aloud, "Recompense!"

She rose and came the step or two toward him, with her eyes upon his face. Her cheeks were pale, he noted, but her eyes were bright, and her form was fuller than he remembered. He looked on her through Crozier's eyes, and was glad to find her comely. "So you've come here to nurse Rinyon?" he welcomed her, and kissed her hand.

"Nay, I did not lie." Her hand rested passive in his. "I will do aught may please him now I am here. He hath ever been kind."

"He is waiting for you," Christopher held it permissible to say; and added, "I have thought long to thank you, too, for that you friended Nan and told her —"

"I did but requite what I owed thee." She drew her hand away, for already she could see that his eyes were straying to the wharf and the shallop. "God be with thee, Christopher!" she hesitated.

"And with you, Recompense," he said, and strode away to the wharf.

She stood and watched him go, that masterful, erect figure in gray, watched till he passed into the little knot of men upon the wharf, and still she watched till the shallop had stood out into the channel. Within the breast of her gown she fumbled and felt the withered stems of a half-dozen faded Mayflowers. "It was for me he suffered it, for me he sat in the stocks, not for her. Naught can alter that!" she murmured.

But the sail of the shallop had now slipped from the land, and in the stern sheets she could not tell one figure from the other. The little craft and the blue water and the sky all dazzled before her eyes. She turned and went slowly along the hot beach toward the house, to tend Rinyon, to do what she had promised. But her hand still pressed her bodice where the Mayflowers lay, and her eyes were wet with the tears she must not shed.

Out in the channel, with the Castle dropping astern, Christopher turned in his seat to gaze upon the beach and the black little figure that moved against it. "They're more tender in their dealings with the Quakers now, sir?" he asked carelessly.

"Nay, there be those in authority are hot as ever upon them. I know not where 'twill end. But this girl seemeth decent and promised me not to spread abroad her doctrines nor seek to quit the Castle. She begged most piteously to come unto the man, and Nan prayed me not to deny her."

A full space of silence settled between the two kinsmen. They were alone in the shallop, and, as in the old times when they had sailed together, Calderwood had the tiller and Christopher the sheets. The wind came in light puffs; all amid

the green islands of the harbor the managing of the boat was a nice matter. But at last, as they stood upon a long tack, Calderwood asked, as if there had not come a break in their talk, "What Nan and this girl Recompense tell me of your going to Trull's cabin and the money, doubtless that is what you wished to tell me two years ago?"

Christopher nodded lightly; that all lay so far behind him!

"I would that your letter had reached me," Calderwood said, and, knowing the man as he did, Christopher realized that was something for him to say. There were no apologies from Calderwood; throughout he had behaved with impartial justice; it was no fault of his that Enoch had withheld Christopher's letter, or that his office had made it incumbent upon him to lead the chase after his nephew. One thing, indeed, he repented, — his undignified loss of temper on the afternoon when Christopher fled from Meadowcreek, — and for that lack of self-control he had humbled himself in prayer and sought the Lord's help, but it was no sin against Christopher.

Yet he was sorry — Christopher, at his side, felt it vaguely — that Enoch had played the knave, that the devil's wiles had laid heavy punishment on a man who was repentant, and, after all, in the broadest sense, innocent. When he spoke again, after they had passed into the more open water beyond Pullen Point, there was in his tone the rare formal kindness that made Christopher almost cease to think on the meeting that was before him: "There is pleasanter matter to speak on, cousin. You were not two months gone from the Bay when there came letters out of England. Lady Mary Ferringham had always an affection to you. Under her will there was left to you a small legacy which was given into my hands. I sought you diligently." A suspicion of a dry smile fluttered on Calderwood's clean-shaven lips. "Indeed, I sought you for more reasons than one. But in justice I resolved to hold the money for five years, in case there came tidings of you. You shall have it now. It hath multiplied somewhat as I employed

it; there is now a hundred and seven pounds and odd shillings —"

"A hundred pounds?" Christopher's eyes opened wide. "Tis a fortune! Faith! 'tis more than —"

"More than the estate you sold to ransom my son?" Calderwood finished the sentence as his nephew halted. "I've talked with your man Jordan — I took him in the shallop with me when I went to Marshpoint. He told me that and much else that you suffered and accomplished in the Barbadoes. If 'twere not for that — you may be assured, Christopher, that a mere swashing fight, however it profited me and mine, had never made me hold you worthy husband for my sister."

So the afternoon wore on and waxed shadowy. Calderwood spoke still, in his chiselled, impersonal sentences: how the man who had rid the seas of Wasket and his gang was sure of pardon for all past misdemeanors; how when the *Gilliflower* put to sea again she would need a captain; but Christopher answered little. Dumb and motionless, he sat watching, till at last, when the glittering water grew sombre and the shore to westward flung long shadows out into the sea, his eyes rested on landmarks that he remembered, and the harbor of Meadowcreek opened before him. He saw the headlands, and the green hills, with the sun upon their tops, and the houses, just as he remembered it all, and, as the shallop tacked up the harbor, he saw the white beach and the wharf and a sprinkling of black figures upon it. "There are folk enough in the village are curious to look on you," Calderwood's voice came again. "But I scarce thought in this light breeze to bring the shallop home to-night. Mind the sheets, Christopher!"

They came about once more, and now the headland over which Christopher had staggered in his hopeless flight shut the wind from their sail, so they no more than crept through the glassy water into Lastbrook cove. An instant Christopher cast down his eyes, and he felt the heart choking in his throat;

then he turned his face from Calderwood and gazed shoreward. The dark pines on the right and on the left he saw, and the beach and the bluff and the upland ranging away above it, and there under the pine trees lay the outbuildings and the farmhouse, and the setting sun cast a still light over all. He remembered each tree, each play of the waning light; it was all as he had dreamed of it, night after night, under the palmetto thatch at Three Winds.

The shallop lay to in the old mooring-place, and he helped Calderwood furl the sail; his hands shook so he was of little service. Then they were over into the canoe. "Give me a paddle!" choked Christopher. The eager splash with which he struck it into the water was loud in the sunset stillness, and the ripples bubbled away from the bow of the canoe.

The little craft had glided into the black shadow of the bluff, and, splashing over into the water, Christopher strode across the hard beach. The soft sand of the path up the bluff gave under his boots, and then he was tramping through the stubbly field. There was smoke curling from the farmhouse chimney, and he heard the cackle of hens. Then some one raised a shrill whoop, and a lanky figure that he knew for Jack's came tearing down the slope to meet him. Three other lads trotted more shyly at his heels, the little cousins, and the least must be Taffy, but, without staying for a word with them, he strode on into the dooryard. Familiar household faces were round him — Deborah, twisting her apron, and Williams, for once agrin with approval, — and Elizabeth Calderwood had her arms about his neck. "Where's Nan?" he asked.

Elizabeth held it a virtue in her that she released him on the word. "She hath gone to seek the cattle," she smiled, with her eyes running over. "We did not hope for you till to-morrow. In the pasture, as of old. Nay, boys, stay with me; let him go alone."

Already Christopher was out of the house-yard. He was running now, without pretence; the brown stubble of the shorn

fields wavered along at his side. Black shadows lay at the edge of the pine woods, and the leaves and the twigs of the lesser undergrowth were merging indistinct. Southward where the brook flowed he heard the frogs piping. He vaulted over the bars into the pasture; it was springing up to woodland, and he crashed through snapping underbrush and trampled on sweet fern that gave out a fragrant smell. He had passed the rocky knoll where Killion and his mates had lain in wait for him; he had reached the far end of the pasture, and, breaking through a growth of alders, he came to the foot of a shallow ravine, between two wooded ridges that climbed upward to the flushed sky.

Then at last, as he halted breathless, he heard the sound for which his ears had been a-strain, a distant tink-tink, the bells of softly grazing cattle. Nan would be with them. He waited, there among the alders, with his eyes on the slit of red sky that showed between the pine trees. Still the cow-bells jangled and the crisp leaves rustled. He was aware of a white-faced cow that had padded through the bushes and stood gazing mildly at him. But his eyes were fixed upon the notch of red, and, while he looked, a slight figure in skirts that clung silhouetted itself black against the sunset glow.

He had meant to spring forward, had meant to call her name, but, crushing in his grasp the alder twig that he had held aside, he kept his stand, there in the bushes, while the pad of the cattle's feet sounded nearer. He heard a restless jangle-jangle, as one cow tossed her head, and then a voice spoke, "So, so, Red Cole! Gently, lass! Come up, Motley! So, so!"

She had come down the ravine; she was abreast of the curious cattle that lagged before him; she turned her face. "Nan! Nan, dear!" He stretched out his hands.

She wavered an instant where she stood, then pressed her hand upon her eyes, and looked again. "Don't go!" she said softly, in her old tone he remembered, and at that he reached her side. His arms locked her fast, and her forehead rested

warm against the hollow of his neck, just as it had been in dreams. She was crying tremulously; the cheek that he kissed was wet. "But it is you—you in the flesh! So many days I have waited. Christie, Christie, you have come back to me!"

The swollen crescent of a moon showed above the dense pines when at length they drove the anxious cattle home. The bells played softly before them, and eastward across the fields they could hear the murmur of the inbreaking waves. Nan drew closer to Christopher's side. "I heard the sea so often, night after night, in Marshpoint, when I lay awake."

He had her hand fast in his, and he felt the slender fingers were roughened; he bent his lips to them. "You shall never toil so again!" he said low. "What I have pulled upon you! Yet you still—"

"I said I would marry you when we could come to Meadowcreek." She gave a little laugh like her old self, and he put his arm about her.

Across the moonlit upland one came running to meet them, and Jack's voice cried gleefully: "Leave off, now! You've time enough to come for your wooing! Leave the pestilence cows to me, and be off to the house. There's Trescott and Moses Atherton and the Constable ridden from the village to speak with worshipful Captain Ferringham, and the rest of Meadowcreek is cooling its heels in the dooryard."

The boy fell behind them, and Christopher and Nan passed a little more swiftly down the cart-path toward the house. A candle shone from the parlor window. He almost halted, and his face under the moonlight was quizzical. "D'ye know?" he said, "most times when Meadowcreek hath been eager to see me, it hath liked them better than it liked me."

Her lips curved into the sweetest of her old mockings, and he knew that her eyes would be laughing at him too. "Why, Christie, dear, they are proud of you! They must have kept you close indeed at the Castle not to know. The story hath

run all up and down the coast, Nate says, — how you took the pirate ship and saved our Jack and quelled the mutiny and single-handed brought the *Gilliflower* home." Her voice broke.

"And I'm prouder of you than any of them!"

"I don't want you to be proud of me," he said bluntly, and they both laughed with the laughter that could as well have been tears.

"Very humble, then," she murmured, and he kissed her swiftly on her coppery hair, and walked then discreetly, for they had come round the corner of the house into the dooryard.

There were men loitering by the stable and by the rails of the cow-yard; they were making pretence of talk with Williams and Harwood, but they broke off now and stood silent, and he knew they had come thither for a sight of him. Jordan and Thorowgood and Dutch Jan he saw from his old crew, and Gershom Field, and there were men from Meadowcreek — Daniel Mawry, and Batter, and Govis, and other rough-and-ready fellows who had had their fling at him once, and now looked pleased for that he called them by name.

He passed slowly through the little company with Nan at his side; he was hot-faced and eager to be gone, but, glancing down at her, he saw that she carried her head high. They went up the doorstone, and he held the door open for her; within, the lights blinked on the table, and he saw familiar faces ready to welcome him.

"And that's the strain o' men they breed in Barbadoes!" Jordan's voice growled out of the dark behind him.

But it was the voice of a village man, Christopher's one-time enemy, Nick Batter, that cried hotly: "Barbadoes? Go to! He belongs to Meadowcreek."

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